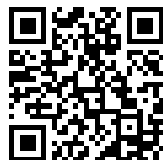


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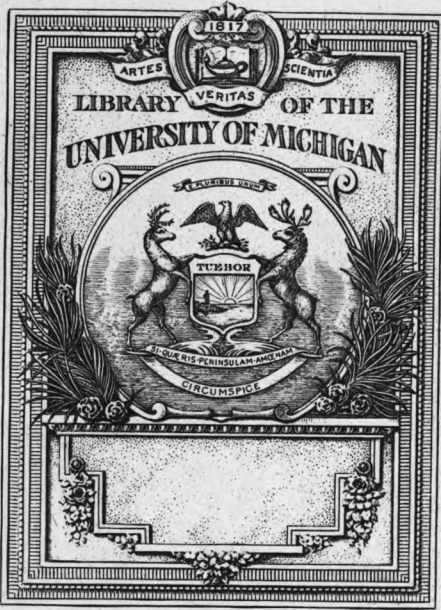
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TWELVE  
LECTURES  
ON  
THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES  
DELIVERED  
ON THE WEDNESDAYS DURING LENT  
IN THE YEARS 1827, 1828.  
TO WHICH IS ADDED A NEW EDITION OF  
FIVE LECTURES  
ON  
THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN  
AS  
BEARING TESTIMONY TO THE DIVINITY OF JESUS CHRIST.

---

BY  
*Charles*  
C. J. *James* **BLOMFIELD, D. D.**  
**BISHOP OF CHESTER,**  
AND RECTOR OF ST. BOTOLPH'S, BISHOPSGATE.

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LONDON:  
PRINTED FOR B. FELLOWES (SUCCESSOR TO MR. MAWMAN),  
LUDGATE STREET;  
AND C. AND J. RIVINGTON, WATERLOO PLACE.  
M DCCC XXVIII.

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**LONDON:**

**R. CLAY, PRINTER, DEVONSHIRE STREET, BISHOPSGATE.**

TO THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND

WILLIAM

LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.



MY LORD,

As Rector of an extensive parish in the City of London, I perform an act of duty, when I inscribe to your Lordship this specimen of my pastoral labours. Your Lordship will be pleased to accept it, not only as a mark of that respect and affection, which I feel in common with all the Clergy of your

diocese ; but as testifying my grateful sense of your kindness, in having confided so important a charge to my hands. By afterwards conferring upon me an office of dignity and trust, your Lordship encouraged me to believe, that I had in some measure justified the good opinion, which had led you so readily to give effect to the wishes of one, who for many years, as the Head of his Majesty's Government, evinced a true sense of the best interests of his country, by his solicitude for the welfare of the Established Church. The higher station, to which I have since been called, while it leaves me still entitled to the benefit of that countenance and advice, with which your Lordship has encouraged and assisted me in the

discharge of my parochial duties, confers upon me the privilege of addressing, as my friend, one whom I have always loved as my benefactor, and revered as my superior in the Church.

That your Lordship may long be spared to adorn that Church by your learning, to edify it by your Christian virtues, and to guide it with your counsel, is the sincere prayer of,

MY LORD,

Your Lordship's

Obliged and Faithful Friend and Servant,

C. J. CHESTER.



## PREFACE.

---

THE following Lectures on the Acts of the Apostles were delivered, on the Wednesdays during the season of Lent, in the years 1827, 1828. and they are now published, in compliance with the wishes of those who heard them. The reader will not expect to find in them any thing of learned disquisition on matters of criticism, or on disputed points of interpretation; nor much of dogmatical theology. They are neither more nor less than the result of an endeavour to render a portion of Scripture history interesting and instructive to a congregation, chiefly consisting of persons with little leisure for research;



by placing its principal features in a striking light, exhibiting their mutual bearing and connexion, and pointing out the practical inferences to be drawn from them. The continual and laborious duties incumbent upon me, as Rector of a populous parish in London, and Bishop of an extensive diocese, have long deprived me of that leisure, without which I could neither hope greatly to benefit the cause of sacred literature, nor to acquire that credit as an author, which is a legitimate, though secondary object of ambition, even to the Christian minister. But my first and dearest object will be attained, if, by these humbler labours in my vocation, I shall have contributed any thing to the spiritual knowledge or advancement of my Christian readers, and especially of those, over whom I am appointed *to watch, as one that must give account.*

The Lectures on St. John were first published in 1823, and have since passed through three editions. They are now reprinted in a larger form; and are to be considered, not as a systematic or complete scriptural proof of the doctrine of our Saviour's divinity; but as a familiar elucidation of that particular branch of the demonstration, which consists in the testimony of the beloved disciple. For a more elaborate and extended view of that testimony, I would refer the reader to an excellent work of Dr. Tittmann, entitled, "Meletemata Sacra, sive Commentarius Exegetico-critico-dogmaticus in Evangelium Ioannis. Lipsiæ. 1816."

In order to assist that class of readers, for whom the Lectures on St. John are chiefly intended, in forming a judgment between the doctrine of the Church of England, and those of the Arians and

Socinians, I have reprinted a very plain and sensible tract, published by Dr. Tucker, Dean of Gloucester, in the year 1774, and now not commonly to be met with.

RECTORY, BISHOPSGATE,

*June 2, 1823.*

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# LECTURES

ON

## THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

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### LECTURE I.

ACTS i. 8.

*Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

SUCH were the last words which the Son of God spoke upon earth: for when he had so said, while the Apostles beheld, *He was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight.* He had just renewed to them the promise of spiritual illumination and support, and announced its speedy fulfilment; he then subjoins to the command, which he had before laid upon them, a prophetic designation of their office. He had commissioned them to *teach all nations, baptizing*

*them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost\**; he had explained to them the nature of that eternal decree of the Most High, which rendered it necessary that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in the name of Jesus Christ; and he now adds, *and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.* This branch of their sacred office was, in point of order, the first: for if they were to preach the Gospel to mankind, as a revelation from God; and Christ crucified, as the Saviour of the world; it was necessary that they should be witnesses, unquestionable witnesses and avouchers, to the truth of those extraordinary facts, upon which were grounded his pretensions to the character of a divine teacher, and their own authority as the interpreters of his doctrine. And this office they fulfilled in three ways; first, by preaching the Gospel, and testifying unto the men of that age, that Jesus was the Christ; secondly, by committing, or causing to be committed, to imperishable records, the history and proofs of the Gospel; and, thirdly, by giving the last attestation of sincere conviction to the

\* Matth. xxviii. 19.

truth of what they taught and asserted, by laying down their lives in its defence.

This then was the provision, which was made by the Author of truth, for establishing the Gospel in the belief of after ages; first, an authentic narrative of the things which Jesus did and taught while he was upon earth, written by, or immediately derived from, those who saw him with their own eyes; and heard him with their own ears; and, secondly, some account of the proceedings of these witnesses; of the proofs which they gave of their sincerity; and of the effects which were produced upon their contemporaries, who were best able to judge of both. The former of these documents we possess in the Gospel History; the latter in the Acts of the Apostles; some of the most remarkable features of which I intend to make the subject of my present course of Lectures.

I need hardly inform you that this book was written by St. Luke, the companion of St. Paul; and addressed to the same Theophilus, for whose information, more especially, he had composed his Gospel. It was therefore natural that the transactions of St. Paul should occupy a prominent station in this history. But there is another reason why St. Luke devoted the greater part of

this book to the ministry of that great Apostle, and no inconsiderable portion also to the acts of St. Peter; while but little in comparison is said of the other Apostles; namely, that his object was, more particularly, to set forth that grand feature of the Gospel scheme, which was for a time mysterious, and ill understood, even to the Apostles themselves, the admission of the Gentiles into the new covenant. In this part of the Gospel dispensation we ourselves are more particularly concerned; and therefore the Acts of the Apostles, independently of the attestation which is borne to the truth of Christianity itself, can never be otherwise than a book of great interest and importance to us, as establishing and illustrating the comprehensive mercy of God, in the redemption, not only of his chosen people, but of all mankind.

Not that this is the only point of view in which this portion of the New Testament is to be regarded by us with devout attention and respect. It is most important, as exhibiting brief, but striking specimens of the method, in which the Apostles executed their high commission; the arguments which they used; the motives which they urged; the conformity which, as preachers of the Gospel, they required, first

from the Jews, and afterwards from the Gentiles. It is also important, as throwing light upon the Epistles written by those holy men to the primitive Churches; while, in return, the allusions, incidentally made in those Epistles to circumstances related in the History of the Acts, are strong confirmations of its authenticity and correctness.\*

In the beginning of the narrative, St. Luke states a fact deserving of notice, that during the forty days which our Saviour passed upon earth, between his resurrection and ascension, he not only proved the reality of his resurrection *by many infallible proofs*, to those who were to be the witnesses of that wonderful fact; but *spoke to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*; that is, he explained to them both the doctrines of the Gospel, and the methods by which they were to be propagated. He instructed them in that truth, which they were all along so reluctant to admit, that *his kingdom was not of this world*; that it was a spiritual kingdom, to be established in the hearts and consciences of men, not by the *weapons of a carnal warfare*, but by the gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost, which *were mighty to the pulling*

\* For a full and striking development of this argument, the reader is referred to Dr. Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*.

*down of strong holds.\** And yet even these discourses of their Divine Master did not entirely eradicate from their minds the long cherished expectation, that he would yet, before his final departure from the world, restore to its ancient power and splendour the commonwealth of Israel. The very last question which they proposed to him, was this, *Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?* Our Lord tells them in reply, that the particular time and manner, in which God would accomplish those prophecies which spoke of the universal prevalence and final triumph of the Messiah's kingdom, was a secret which he had reserved to himself; that in the mean time, they were to assert his spiritual supremacy, and to build up his kingdom on the foundations which he had laid; and that power should be given them for the effectual performance of that work, in the miraculous progress of which they were to discern a pledge of its final success and consummation.

Amongst the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, of which our blessed Lord discoursed with his Apostles, we may reasonably conclude, was a fuller development of many of those mysteries of the kingdom, of which, during his ministry, he

\* 2 Cor. x. 4.

had spoken only in parables, or by implication. He himself had said to them, with reference to the high and spiritual nature of his doctrines, and the then partially enlightened minds of his disciples, *I have yet many things to say unto you; but ye cannot bear them now.\** Nor were even the last discourses of their Lord sufficient entirely to clear away all misapprehension and prejudice; but the direct and powerful influence of the Spirit was required: *Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.* Upon the fulfilment of this promise depended the credibility and authority of the Apostles, as the preachers of a new religion. It was therefore expedient that its accomplishment should be public, notorious, and unquestionable; and that it should take place at Jerusalem; in order that the Jews, as they had before had opportunities of witnessing the most remarkable proofs of the divine authority of Jesus Christ, might also be witnesses of one grand and indubitable attestation to the heavenly mission of his Apostles; that so their unbelief might be without excuse, and the justice of God, as well as his mercy, might be manifested, in the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

\* John xvi. 12.



The Ascension of our Lord into the glories of his Father's kingdom was a spectacle vouchsafed to his faithful disciples alone. Many wonderful miracles had been seen and denied by the Jews; who, when they had consummated their wickedness by crucifying Him who had wrought those miracles before their eyes, deserved not that the goodness of God should condescend to set before them any further proofs of the Messiahship of his Son. But the visible and glorious assumption of Jesus to himself, was a sight permitted to those who had adhered to him in his state of humiliation; as a ground of encouragement, and an opportunity of instruction. When admonished by the angels, that He who was taken up from them into heaven, *should so come, in like manner as they had seen him go into heaven*, they could not but experience much refreshment and joy, in the recollection of his own promise, which now for the first time they understood, *I go to prepare a place for you; that where I am, there ye may be also.\** That promise was also made to us: and in general, while we are to be cautious not to apply to ourselves, according to the strictness of the letter, all the precepts delivered by our Lord to his Apostles, or by the Apostles to

\* John xiv. 2.

their immediate followers, without making due allowance for change of circumstances; yet, on the other hand, we are not to imagine, that *we* have no part at all in any one of those promises of grace and glory, which were made to *them*; but rather to rejoice in the assurance of our participation in the same spiritual consolations which they enjoyed; provided that we be *followers of them, as they also were of Christ.\**

Upon their return to Jerusalem, to wait for the fulfilment of the promise, the Apostles *continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.* How touching a spectacle is presented by the infant Church of Christ! A *little flock* chosen out of an unbelieving world, who had seen within the short space of scarcely more than forty days, their Master and Teacher ignominiously nailed to the cross, and taken up triumphantly into heaven. Behold them waiting with earnest anxiety, but with humble and holy confidence, for the advent of that Comforter, who was to supply his place: the faithful and teachable disciples, the mourning mother, now resigned and consoled, and the brethren of Jesus, utterly disappointed in their hopes of temporal

\* 1 Cor. xi. 1.

advancement, but more than comforted by the glorification of their Master, and their own designation as his witnesses to the world. Let those who, under a sense of their own infirmity and ignorance, long for the gifts of the Spirit—and he who feels no such longings has yet to learn what Christ requires, and what he himself is able to do—let them, I say, *wait* for those gifts, as the Apostles did, *in prayer and supplication*. But let their prayers be general, for such a measure and kind of spiritual influence, as God may see to be sufficient for his present purposes towards them; and, especially, let them beware of marking out the precise direction and method in which the Spirit of truth shall be called upon to illuminate their minds.

Some caution is required to guard a pious mind against the danger of misapplying the example of the eleven Apostles, who, after having prayed to God to show whether he had chosen Barnabas or Matthias to the Apostleship, decided the question by lots. The question was one, in which the Holy Ghost was immediately concerned; the method of its decision was one appointed in certain cases by God himself in the law; but it is rashness and presumption to imagine, as I fear some Christians do, that they

are at liberty, first to determine the importance of a particular question; then to fix upon some contingent alternative, as the method of deciding it; and, lastly, to be confident, that by the issue of that alternative, in answer to their prayers, God will certainly determine their doubts.

I have already remarked, that the promise of the Comforter was to be fulfilled at Jerusalem, in order that the Jews might witness an unquestionable attestation to the divine commission of the Apostles, as they had before witnessed many to that of Jesus, but in vain. But there was another and a very important reason for our Lord's command, that they should await the fulfilment of his promise in the holy city; which was, that at that season of the year, not only Jews, but devout men, worshippers of the true God, although not observers of the Mosaic law, from every part of the civilized world, were gathered together in Jerusalem at the great solemnity of the Passover; that as the Apostles were commanded to be *witnesses to Jesus unto the uttermost part of the earth*, they themselves might have witnesses, in every country and city, whither they should go, who could bear testimony to this miraculous effusion of the Holy Spirit.

I need not dwell upon the circumstances of

that astonishing event; the awful sound from heaven, and the brightness which played around the heads of the Apostles, and denoted that the Spirit had found in these holy men a fit habitation for himself. Yet it may be proper to remark, that when Elijah was summoned to the presence and more immediate converse of Jehovah, amongst the symptoms and indications of the divine presence were a great and strong wind, and a fire\*; and still more appropriately may the cloven tongues of fire be compared to the glory of the Lord, which rested on the tabernacle, and denoted the indwelling of the Deity. As in the earlier ages of the old covenant, that symbol of brightness indicated that the Lord had chosen a peculiar people to protect and bless; and a particular place *to set his name there*; so at the feast of Pentecost, in the dawning of the Gospel dispensation, the cloven tongues of fire, which sat upon each of the Apostles, and the first manifestation of divine power in the gift of various languages, proclaimed the universality of the Gospel dispensation, and the certain fulfilment of those ancient prophecies which foretold the *pouring forth of the Spirit upon all flesh*.† It is easy to imagine the wonder and awe which filled the

\* 1 Kings xix. 11.

† Acts ii. 17.

minds of the devout multitude, when they beheld twelve unlearned and simple Galileans thus distinguished by the visible evidences of divine favour, and suddenly speaking, with freedom and vernacular propriety, many languages which it was not possible that they should have learned by human means.

The propriety of this miracle, and its necessity to men who were commanded to teach all nations, are too obvious to need illustration. But it calls for one remark. There are two channels of information, by which the Creator has enabled mankind to arrive at a knowledge of truth, namely, sight, and hearing. And each has its appropriate sources, from which a knowledge of the things pertaining unto God are derived into the mind. The visible world, or natural kingdom of God, is the province, in which the eyes expatiate, in search of materials for contemplation: the invisible world, or spiritual kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, is that which *cometh by hearing*. In other words, the visible world leads the way to the religion of nature; the invisible, through hearing, to the religion of grace. As St. Paul says, *The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his*

*eternal power and Godhead.\** But of the Christian religion he says, *faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.†* And that this method of arriving at divine truth is the surest, appears from this; that even the most stupendous miracles, although they overpowered the reason, and established the fact of divine interposition, did not enlighten the minds of those who were only spectators to the understanding of Gospel doctrine; whereas the plain and simple exposition of it, from the mouth of an Apostle, made thousands *wise unto salvation.*

The miracle, therefore, which was wrought on the day of Pentecost, was not intended merely to convince the assembled multitude, that the Apostles were divinely commissioned to preach a new religion, (although that was one important end to be answered); but to enable the Apostles themselves to use the instrument of speech, without let or hindrance, wheresoever they might be; that the *word of the Lord might have free course and be glorified*, being easily transmitted through the ears into the minds and hearts of men.

The simple preaching of the Gospel to heathen people was the end for which the gift of tongues

\* Rom. i. 20.

† Rom. x. 17.

was bestowed upon its first teachers; but the gift was in itself so well calculated to excite admiration in those who witnessed its effects, that we are not to wonder, if some of the first converts abused it to the gratification of personal vanity. St. Paul with much earnestness instructs the Corinthians in the true purpose of that gift, the explanation of the divine counsels as revealed in Scripture, to the unconverted or the unlearned; which he terms prophesying: *I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied; for greater is he that prophesieth, than he that speaketh with tongues, except ye interpret, that the church may receive edifying. Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak unto you either by revelation, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?\** From this passage it appears, that those who possessed the gift of tongues, were not limited in their use of it by the exigency of the occasion, but could at any time speak in languages unknown to their hearers. It is an important fact, that even the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit might be misused and misapplied: a consideration, which may inspire with diffidence and humility those who have made some

\* 1 Cor. xiv. 5.



progress in the inward knowledge of Christianity, and some proficiency in its practical graces. Let none suppose themselves secure from error or lapse; but exert continual care and diligence to go on adding one virtue to another; and whatever degrees of light or strength they may have attained, pray for grace still further to improve them.

In my next Lecture I propose to consider some features of the discourse, which St. Peter delivered to the devout persons who were present at the first effusion of the Holy Spirit: at present I will only notice its results:—*Then they that gladly received the word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls:* and it is afterwards said, *The Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved:* that is, as the original word denotes, those that were in a state to be saved; those who were prepared at once to obey the warning just delivered to them, *save yourselves from this untoward generation.* And what was the process? First, they believed the preaching of the Apostle; then they were baptized; then they continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers. To these devotional indications

of a true belief they added the more substantial fruits of the Spirit, *They sold their possessions, and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.* How beautiful a picture of the Church of Christ in all its primitive perfection! Steadfast belief; fervent piety; exemplary devotion; ardent charity! How striking and emphatic a description of the faithful ministers of Christ, and of the reception which such ministers will rarely fail to meet with; *and they*, that is, the Apostles and preachers of the word, *continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart—praising God, and having favour with all the people.*

Be it our constant endeavour, my Christian friends, in the several stations which we occupy in the household of Christ, to approach, as nearly as possible, to that perfect model of faith, and zeal, and uniformity, and love. May *we* be enabled to prove ourselves in spirit, as in office, the true successors of the Apostles; and may *you* embody, by the aid of the Holy Ghost, in every part and feature of your conduct towards God and man, the scripture portrait of a primitive Christian.

## LECTURE II.

—◆—  
ACTS ii. 36.

*Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

ONE of the most important and interesting subjects of inquiry to a student of the New Testament, is the method pursued by the first teachers of Christianity, in establishing its truth, and propagating its doctrines. Indeed, without attending to this, it is not possible to understand the exact and complete meaning of the sacred writings, nor the consistency and harmony of all their parts. If we find both our Lord himself and his Apostles, but especially his Apostles, pursuing on different occasions a very different line of demonstration and argument; at one time insisting particularly upon one truth or fact, and at another on another; it is evident that we ought not to form our own notions of the Christian scheme, either as to its proofs or

its doctrines, upon any *one* of these discourses, or epistles; but carefully to consider, when, and to whom each of them was written or addressed, and the particular view of the Christian teacher at the time, with reference to his grand object, of declaring, in due season, *the whole counsel of God*. Now it appears, in fact, as we should have expected to find in men of more than ordinary wisdom, that in addressing themselves to unbelievers, the Apostles adapted their preaching to the understandings and prepossessions of their hearers. In endeavouring to turn the Gentiles to God, they laboured first to dispossess them of those fundamental errors, which were most opposite to the spirit of the Gospel, and to instil into their minds those great truths, which lie at the very threshold and entrance of all religion, but particularly of the Christian religion. In preaching to the Jews, who had the privilege of being first invited to enter into the Gospel covenant, and whose minds were filled with magnificent notions of their expected Messiah, and of the perpetual obligation and sacredness of their law, the Apostles laboured principally to convince them, by a correct, but new interpretation of the prophecies, and by the miracles which Jesus had wrought, that he was indeed

the Messiah; and that to him alone they were to look, as the author of eternal salvation. When once they had succeeded in proving this truth to the satisfaction of an inquiring Jew, he would be prepared to receive Jesus Christ as a divine Teacher and Master; to submit to his authority in matters both of faith and duty; and to enter, in the fulness of a matured belief, into the *great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh.*\*

This observation will explain the reason why St. Peter, in his earnest exhortation to his countrymen at the feast of Pentecost, does not begin the process of conviction, by telling them at once, that Jesus, whom he preached, and whom they had crucified, was the incarnate Son of God; which if he had told them, they would probably not have listened to another word: but he sets himself to prove that Jesus was their Messiah; and speaks of him as *a man approved of God, by miracles and signs and wonders, which God did by him*; as having been betrayed and crucified *by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*; and as having been raised up from death, agreeably to those prophecies which were confessedly applicable to the

\* 1 Tim. iii. 16.

Messiah alone. *Therefore, he concludes, let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ; that is, hath made him your true King and Messiah. And in his second discourse to the Jews, contained in the third chapter of the Acts, he speaks of Jesus as the Son of God, the Holy One and the Just, the Prince, or author of life, and tells them, Those things which God before hath showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ, or the Messiah, should suffer; he hath so fulfilled. But in the same Apostle's conversation with Cornelius, a devout Gentile, although a worshipper of the true God, he lays the principal stress upon these two things, that Jesus was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead; and that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.\** In the first sermon which St. Paul preached to the Jews, as recorded in the thirteenth chapter of the Acts, he sets himself to prove from their Scriptures, that Jesus must be the Messiah; and that through him they might be *justified from all those things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses;†* but to the

\* Acts x. 42.

† Acts xiii. 39.

heathen idolaters of Lycaonia his prayer was, that they should *turn from those vanities of idol-worship to the living God*;\* and to the Athenians he proves, upon the plainest principles of philosophy, that the Godhead could not be likened *unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device*; nor ought to be worshipped under such similitudes: that their ignorance could no longer be excused, after that a revelation of the truth had been made; and that a day of judgment was appointed, and the Judge already predetermined and installed into his office, even Jesus Christ, whom God had raised from the dead.†

I have noticed this point at some length, in order to show, that these discourses of the Apostles, recorded in the Acts, are not to be regarded as summary and comprehensive statements of Christian doctrine; but simply as assertions and arguments, intended to convince the Jews, that Jesus was their promised Messiah, and the Gentiles, that he was a teacher sent from God. To those, who had already been converted to the truth as it was in Jesus, they spoke more largely and precisely of the interior parts of Christian doctrine and practice; but

\* Acts xiv. 15.

† Acts xvii. 29—31.

even these they conducted by degrees, and step by step, to the fulness of evangelical truth; having *milk for babes, and strong meat for those of full age.*\*

There is another point of difference to be noted, as to the first preaching of the Gospel. John the Baptist, we are told, *preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*; † such a remission, that is, as sinners would receive, upon being admitted, after having qualified themselves by repentance, into the privileges of the Gospel covenant. Our Saviour himself was chiefly occupied in proving, by the fulfilment of the prophecies in his own person, that the kingdom of heaven, or of the Messiah, was come; and in preparing the Jews for the abrogation of the ceremonial law; for the reception of a more spiritual worship of God; and for the great doctrine, that he himself was to be the final atonement for the sins of the world. The Apostles, after the day of Pentecost, insisted upon the necessity of repentance, or an entire change of sentiment and opinion; an implicit faith in Jesus Christ as a Teacher and a Saviour; the result of which was to be that the believer's *sins* should be *blotted out.* ‡ And the foundation,

\* Heb. v. 13, 14. † Mark i. 4. ‡ Acts iii. 19.



or at least the key-stone, of all these doctrines was that great miracle, of which, by preeminence, the Apostles were witnesses, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This was the fact, upon which they most strenuously insisted, and for asserting which they were subjected to persecution and martyrdom; because it was in fact the seal and attestation which God had set to the divine mission of Jesus, and to the truth of the Gospel.

The fourth chapter of the Acts contains a striking example of that hardness of heart, and that blindness of understanding, which sometimes close the eyes of men against the clearest and fullest light of truth. The rulers and elders of the Jews, being enraged at the success which had attended the preaching of Peter and John, conferred among themselves, saying, *What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them, is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.* They persuaded themselves, probably, that this miracle had been wrought by the agency of evil spirits; that as Jesus had been crucified, in spite of his

pretensions to a relationship with God, nothing could afterwards establish the authority of his mission; and that no proofs whatever could be valid, which went to abrogate the law of Moses. In fact, there is no kind of evidence, against which the mind may not be closed by prejudice or passion.\* And in some cases, the very efforts, which a profane or sensual heart makes against the admission of divine truth, generate a malignity and bitterness of hatred, which increases in proportion to the claims and evidences which it has to combat, and makes them, who were first doubtful, and then unbelieving, become at length blasphemers and persecutors of the truth. Of this we have seen of late a dreadful example, in that knot of miserable sinners, who meet together in the heart of this Christian country, not to discuss the evidences of Christianity, but to ridicule the Gospel, and to revile its blessed Author. Yet if they cannot believe that Gospel, there is surely nothing to hate in it: the purity of its morality; the peacefulness and charity of its precepts; the bright examples which it

\* For a statement of the prejudices which prevented the Jews from receiving Jesus as their Messiah, the reader may consult with advantage Jortin's Discourses concerning the Truth of the Christian Religion, chap. I.

sets forth of patient endurance and courageous piety, are such as might claim the respect and admiration even of those who deny its divine authority. But what should make the unbeliever hate, and deride, and insult it? Why should he revile and calumniate that Just and Holy One, who, to say the least, *went about doing good* during his life, and laid down that life, that he might convince mankind of the truth of his religion? We cannot account for it, except on two principles; first, that the more unreasonable and improbable any position is, when once it has been taken, the more tenaciously and obstinately it is defended, by the passions, rather than the reason; and, secondly, that after a certain resistance to conviction, the grace of God is withdrawn; the sinner is left to a judicial hardness of heart, as a punishment for having *done despite unto the spirit of grace*.\*

The same chapter teaches a memorable lesson to the ministers of the Gospel, which in different ages of the Church they have been called upon to realize in suffering and death. When the council commanded Peter and John not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus, *they answered and said unto them, Whether it*

\* Heb. x. 29.

*be right, in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.* Such has ever been the language holden by the martyrs and confessors of Christ's Church, when threatened by the terrors, or enticed by the promises of the world, to be faithless to their sacred trust. Such also will be the language of every true minister of the Word, when he finds the prevalent and popular opinions of those, amongst whom he lives, opposed to the genuine doctrines of the Gospel. When popularity might be purchased by flattering their prejudices, or by overlooking their unchristian practices, he remembers that he is the servant of God and of the truth, not of the world; and frequently puts the alternative to his own conscience, in order to animate himself in the faithful and fearless discharge of his duty; Whether it be right, in the sight of God, to hearken unto these more than unto God, it is easy to judge. I cannot but speak the things which I find plainly written in his word; *woe unto me, if I preach not the Gospel.\** I beseech you, my brethren, to remember this burthen which God has laid upon our consciences, when

\* 1 Cor. ix. 16.

we speak freely to you of the things which concern your everlasting peace. We dare not be silent, as we have to answer for it to *Him*, when we see your eternal salvation in hazard.

The courage and fidelity of the Apostles were met by a devoted, ardent zeal, a self-denying, active charity, on the part of their hearers. That was indeed a golden age of the Church, such an age as will no more return, till the kingdom of Christ shall be finally established, when *the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul; neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed were his own, but they had all things common.\** It is however proper to remark, that an absolute community of goods, although it existed, in a certain sense, amongst the first company of believers, was not insisted upon by the Apostles, as a necessary feature in the constitution of the Christian Church; and indeed, on an extensive scale, would not have been politic, had it been possible. We find many precepts in the Epistles, which distinctly recognize the difference of rich and poor, and mark out the respective duties of each class; and St. Paul, in particular, far from enforcing a community of goods, enjoins those

\* Acts iv. 32.

who were well off in the world, to make a contribution every week for those who were poorer.\* Yet the *spirit* of this primitive system should pervade the Church in all ages. All Christians ought to consider their worldly goods, in a certain sense, as the common property of their brethren. A certain part they may and ought to appropriate to the support and convenience of themselves and theirs, and even, it may be, to the maintenance of that rank which the subordination of society makes it expedient that they should fill: but there is a part, which by the laws of God and nature belongs to their brethren; who, if they cannot implead them for its wrongful detention before an earthly tribunal, have their right and title to it written by the finger of God himself in the records of the Gospel, and will see it established at the judgment-day.

Amongst those evangelical virtues and graces, in which the Church of these days presents but a faint and cold adumbration of the primitive household of faith, I fear there is not any in which we fall more short of the original than in charity. Let no man congratulate himself upon having attained the fulness and perfectness

\* 1 Cor. xvi. 2, 3.

of Christian charity, till he can say with sincerity, and exemplify that sincerity in his deeds, *that nought that he possesses is his own,\** but that he has all things for the common advantage of himself and his brethren.

He, who has given us the good things of this life, does not peremptorily enjoin upon us the sacrifice of all we possess; nor did he even in the time of the Apostles. The liberality of the first believers was a spontaneous liberality; and the giving up of all that they had, was not an indispensable proof of their fellowship with the saints. But what is given in the name of Christian charity, as an offering to God, for and through Christ, must be given freely and sincerely, from pure unmixed motives, not with a desire to obtain the credit of liberality; and with no vain attempt to impose upon our own consciences, and to make a compromise with God, by pretending to offer him as much as we can afford to give, when we might and ought to give a great deal more. We read the punishment of such an endeavour in the fate of Ananias and Sapphira, who pretended a devotion to the cause of the Gospel which they did not feel, and made a fatal attempt to unite the services of

\* Acts iv. 32.

God and Mammon. The punishment was severe : but the state of the infant Church required the immediate rebuke of every hypocritical pretence to the character of a true believer, and a signal demonstration of that indwelling of the Spirit, which enabled the Apostles to search the hearts and judge of the sincerity of such professors. The sin of Ananias was of a complicated kind ;—vainglory and covetousness, impiety and fraud. He expected to purchase for himself both a share in the Church's distribution of its common stock, and a participation in the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, which were then vouchsafed to believers. On this account, and because he attempted to deceive those holy men upon whom the Spirit of truth had so lately descended in a visible shape, his sin was termed *lying unto the Holy Ghost*, and *tempting the Spirit of the Lord*. In fact it appears, that Ananias and Sapphira could not have believed in their hearts that the Apostles were actually endued with the gifts of the Spirit, or they would not have ventured upon an attempt to deceive them.

The effect of that awful display of the divine indignation against religious hypocrisy, was to cement and consolidate the rising Church of God, and to deter and exclude those worldly-



minded pretenders to sanctity, whose accession would have injured its strength and character. *Great fear, says the historian, came upon all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things. And of the rest, durst no man join himself to them; but the people magnified them, and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.\** This expression seems to imply, that the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira impressed the minds of all who heard of it, with such awe and reverence towards the Apostles, that as they stood teaching in Solomon's porch, no man durst join himself to them, as one of their own company; but the people magnified them, that is, reverently esteemed and honoured them; while a conviction of their divine authority converted multitudes to the true faith.

In the same chapter we have another proof, that the plainest and most striking evidences of truth are lost upon those, whose hearts are occupied by prejudice and worldly-mindedness. When the Apostles were miraculously liberated from prison, and brought a second time before the council, they were again rebuked as deceivers; and again did they make that declaration,

\* Acts v. 11, 13, 14.

*We ought to obey God rather than men.\** And when they had such credentials to produce of a divine commission; the resurrection of Jesus, the gifts of the Spirit residing in themselves, the wonderful works which they had wrought before all the people; conviction ought to have followed their words: but instead thereof there was vexation and anger. When the council heard them, *they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.* By the advice, however, of Gamaliel, they restrained their malice for a season, and having *beaten the Apostles, and commanded them not to preach in the name of Jesus, they let them go.* And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that *they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.* And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

God be praised, that the sincerity of our Christian profession is not now exposed to so severe a test, as that of the Apostles and first believers. The Gospel is now outwardly, at least, and ostensibly predominant; and is not opposed by the direct persecution of temporal power. But the conflict between good and

\* Acts v. 29.

evil, between Christ and Belial, is still going on, under various shapes and names; and still it frequently happens, that in the faithful, fearless discharge of his duty to Christ, the believer and the preacher of the Gospel are called upon to suffer loss or shame for his name. This is especially the case in those countries where the Romish Church has a preponderating influence; where an abjuration of error, and a profession of the pure faith of the Reformed Churches, are often followed by alienation of kindred and neighbourhood; a destitution of worldly means; contempt, rebuke, and reproach. May all confessors of the true faith, have grace *to rejoice that they are counted worthy to suffer shame for Christ!* Such are the trials, to which God has ever subjected his elect, for the truth's sake, in those seasons when he has determined to purify his Church. And they who go through the furnace, under the shadow of his grace, uninjured by the flame, are numbered amongst the inheritors of the promise, *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.\**

May we all be actuated and supported by the

\* Rev. iii. 21.

same spirit, which enabled the Apostles to set forward the cause of the Gospel; a spirit of zeal, and of charity; of zeal for the truth as it is in Jesus; of charity towards those who are in error; and of fervent gratitude towards God, who has been pleased to impart to us, unworthy as we are of the least of his gifts, *the unsearchable riches of Christ!*

## LECTURE III.

ACTS vii. 59.

*And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying,  
Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*

**N**EXT to the holy Apostles, the person, whose death is recorded in the text, was the earliest defender of Christianity: his reward was, the distinction of being the first martyr in its cause. Within a short time after our Saviour's death, the Church had become very numerous in Jerusalem, the place where the chief priests and scribes thought that they had effectually checked the progress of the new religion, by the cruel example which they had made of its author. The believers consisted principally of two classes of people; the Hebrews, or Jews of Palestine, who had embraced the faith of Christ; and the Grecians, Jews of the Dispersion, natives of towns where the Greek language was spoken; or those, who having been born heathens, had adopted

the Jewish religion. The due administration of the common fund of the Church having become too burthensome for the Apostles, who were desirous of *giving themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word*, they appointed to that charge seven deacons, or ministers, chosen by the brethren, *men of honest report*, spiritual and discreet; of whom the chief was Stephen. It appears that from the beginning of the Christian Church, the order of deacons was a distinct spiritual order, and not merely appointed for the temporal ends and convenience of the Church; for *when the Apostles had prayed, they laid their hands on them*; and we find them immediately afterwards acting in concert with the Apostles, although in due subordination to them, as preachers of the Gospel. It is also to be remarked, that, as the primitive Christians usually made their contributions every Lord's day, and at the Lord's table, for the use of the poor, the deacons were, from the first, employed in the service of that table; and it appears, from the example of Philip, that they were authorised to baptize for the Apostles, as the Apostles themselves had baptized for Jesus, during his ministry. The Apostles in person planted Churches in different cities of the East,

gave them rules, and ordained presbyters to preside over them in sacred things, and to teach them the way of salvation: of these, in process of time, when they were themselves prevented from visiting and ordering the Churches, they appointed some to exercise their own authority, and to ordain ministers, as occasion required. Such were Timothy at Ephesus, and Titus in Crete. These were the first bishops, superintendents, and overseers of the flock of Christ. To these, and to the presbyters, or elders, the deacons were assistants. These three spiritual orders alone are recognized in the annals of the early Church; and these three alone, as being of scriptural authority, does our own reformed and apostolical Church acknowledge.

The Apostles, being no longer embarrassed with secular cares, devoted themselves with increased energy and effect to the work of the ministry; *and the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith; and Stephen, adds the sacred historian, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.* The faith he possessed before his ordination to the office of

deacon ; his power, derived from God, was conferred upon him when he was ordained, at the imposition of hands by the Apostles. But his faith and power were qualities, which placed him, as it were, in the front rank of the battle which was waging between the Lord of life and the prince of this world ; made him an intrepid and successful soldier under the banner of the cross ; and honoured him with the first crown of martyrdom. The conversion of a great company of the priests, whose chiefs were the most obstinate and implacable enemies of Christ, was a signal triumph, which seems to have been achieved in part by the zeal and eloquence of Stephen. He was accordingly regarded as one of the ablest advocates of the new religion, and assailed by some of the subtlest disputants of the synagogue of the African and Asiatic Jews, the Libertines, (or citizens of Libertum, a town on the coast of Africa, who, together with the Jews from Cyrene, a neighbouring town, and from Alexandria, had their own synagogue at Jerusalem,) and of them of Cilicia and Asia ; *and they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.* He proved, no doubt, by a comparison of the ancient prophecies with the character, and actions, and discourses of Jesus,



that he was the expected Messiah; that he was greater than Moses; that he was the only-begotten Son of God. That Stephen did assert the divine character of Jesus, and his authoritative abrogation of the law of Moses, we may collect from St. Luke's expression, *then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.* On this charge he was carried before the council; where, upon being questioned by the high priest, who sat as president, *Are these things so?* he delivered that speech which is contained in the seventh chapter of the Acts. In this defence, he vindicates himself from the charge of blasphemy against the law of Moses, by showing, first, that Abraham and his family served and pleased God before the giving of the law; secondly, that Moses himself foretold the coming of a prophet, whose authority was to supersede his own; thirdly, that the law, good as it was, had not restrained the Jewish people from idolatrous practices. As to the temple, it was no blasphemy, he tells them, to predict its destruction; for it did not exist till long after the time of Moses; and although it was a magnificent habitation for the God of Jacob, yet *He dwelleth not in*

*temples made with hands*; and, lastly, as to the opposition which their leading men offered to the religion of Jesus, that was no proof of its falsehood, but rather an argument in its favour; since they had at all times resisted the counsels and persecuted the messengers of the Most High; slaying the prophets, who from time to time were appointed to *show before of the coming of the Just One*; that Just One, whose death had filled up the measure of their iniquity, and put the seal to their doom.

Such appears to be the purport of the defence which Stephen made before the council; and, as might be expected, it served still further to enflame the animosity of the proud and obstinate Jews. *When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.* On the other hand, the pious believer, *full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God; and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.* Now there is no occasion to suppose, that Stephen saw the heavens actually open, or the glorious appearance of the divinity manifested to his bodily sight. It seems to be a more probable

opinion, that, in the transport of his zeal and devotion, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, he enjoyed an inward vision of the glories of the heavenly kingdom; like St. Peter, who, while he was praying, *fell into a trance, and saw heaven opened.*\*

Let us pause here for a moment, to remark, that the energy of a lively faith, and an ardent spirit of devotion in this holy man, were able, while the fear of death was before him, to transport him beyond the confines of mortality, into that eternal sphere of glory, where the Redeemer stands at the right hand of his Almighty Father, making intercession for the faithful, and waiting to receive them to himself. It is true, that in the instance before us, it was a faith, strengthened and enlightened by the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit: but will the assistance of the same Spirit be withholden from any true disciple, at his most trying hour of need? Surely not. Has it never, my friends, fallen to your lot, to witness something of the same kind, taking place in the soul of the dying Christian? At that awful moment, when the spirit is disengaging itself from its fleshly tabernacle, and is held to earth only by one slender thread of vitality, its

\* Acts x. 10.

vision seems to be purified and brightened, and to extend its glance into the world of spirits. While weeping friends stand round the bed of the departing saint, trembling, and sorrowing, *that they shall see his face no more, his eyes glisten with unwonted fire: his words are as the words of one having authority: he loses sight of the world; and, pointing towards heaven, he proclaims his present enjoyment of the beatific vision, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.*

Whoever has been present at such a scene, has witnessed the most sublime and touching exemplification of the power of Christian faith; and hard indeed must be the heart, which is not moved by such a spectacle to holy meditations and pious wishes: *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!\**

Incensed, not only at the unyielding fortitude of the pious deacon, but at his professing to see the despised and crucified Jesus at the right hand of God, his accusers *ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.* His last words bespoke

\* Numb. xxiii. 10.

the true disciple of Jesus; *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*: a fit prayer to be preferred to that Lord, who upon the cross had prayed for those that crucified him, *Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.*\*—*And when he had said this, he fell asleep.* The moment of death may be one of agony; but its bitterness is soon over, and then all is quiet. To the faithful Christian, at least, death is followed by repose:—the Apostle speaks of departed saints as of *them that sleep in Jesus*. And it is a sleep, not as the heathens described it, an endless, hopeless sleep; but a blessed repose, from which the soul shall hereafter be called forth to rejoin the glorified body, thenceforward to be numbered amongst the blessed spirits, who *rest not day nor night*, praising and glorifying God.

Let us now consider, what reflections may be made upon this history for our own instruction and improvement. Stephen was the first of that noble army of martyrs, who set the seal of their blood to their profession of faith in Christ crucified; who from time to time gave proof of the power of the Gospel, from the earliest ages of the Church, down to the era of a Cranmer, a Ridley, and a Latimer,

\* Luke xxiii. 34.

whose *praise is in the Gospel throughout all the churches* ;\* and their reward, to be numbered amongst those *which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*† The instance, which we have now considered, is far from being the only one, in which the Lord, whom they professed, has imparted to the Christian sufferers a courage and resolution more than human, a serenity which no torments could discompose, nor death itself disturb.

To persecutions so severe as these, it is to be hoped we shall never be exposed. Yet who can say, what fiery trials still await the faithful servants of Jesus Christ? The prospects of his Church have never been quite unclouded and serene; nor are they now. A cruel bigotry is but too likely to mark the course of a wild fanaticism; an intolerant and persecuting spirit is the never-failing characteristic of the atheist and the leveller. The soldiers of Christ must rally round the standard of the cross; and if it should please the great Lord of the world that we should be trodden in the wine-press of his wrath, we must not give place to the enemies of the Gospel, no, not for an instant;

\* 2 Cor. viii. 18.

† Rev. vii. 14.

but cheerfully resign even life itself, rather than betray our religion; assured, that the same power which supported the first Christian martyr in his extremity, will not forsake *us* in the hour of trial.

But surely we may draw another inference from this passage of Scripture, more immediately applicable to ourselves. If for the love of Christ these holy men could cheerfully fulfil, to the very letter, that hard precept of their Master, and *lose their lives for his name's sake*,\* ought *we* to sink under trials incomparably less severe? and rather than relinquish a very few of the good things of the world, rather than sacrifice some of our bodily enjoyments, ought we to desert our duty to Christ, and forego, together with the precepts of the Gospel, its promises and hopes? Surely, at the great day of inquisition, when the careless Christian, who gave way unresistingly to the enemies of his salvation, and sacrificed conscience to enjoyment, shall be called upon to give account of his services, there will rise up, to testify against him, and to condemn his carelessness and apostasy, that resolute and holy band, who withstood the great accuser and all his arts, and *overcame him*

\* Matt. x. 39.

*by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and loved not their lives unto the death.\** Let us continually pray for such a measure of light and grace, that whatever trials we may encounter in the course of our Christian warfare, we may be enabled with the eye of faith to look up steadfastly into heaven, and to *see the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.*

Let me now draw your attention to a very remarkable feature in the history of the first martyrdom; I mean the exclamation which the pious sufferer uttered, when his spirit was about to take its departure from the body. The words of the historian in the fifty-ninth verse, are these; *And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.* The words *upon God*, are supplied by the translators, not being in the original; the exact rendering of which is as follows; *And they stoned Stephen, invoking and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit;* that is, invoking Jesus, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Which way soever it be rendered, we have here a distinct and emphatic prayer to Jesus Christ, uttered under a lively

\* Rev. xii. 10, 11.



sense of the instant approach of death, by a holy man, full of faith and of the Holy Ghost: a prayer, which, if Jesus had been no more than a man, would have been idolatrous; an insult offered to the majesty of God by his chosen servant, at the moment of his being called to his account.

The fact is, that Stephen died a martyr to that grand and vital doctrine, the Divinity of Christ.\* He was accused of speaking blasphemous things against the temple and the law; *against Moses, and against God.* The temple was to be destroyed; the law was to be, as to its ritual part, abolished; Moses was declared inferior to Christ; inasmuch as Christ was a partaker of the divine nature. It was this last assertion which incensed the multitude. When he rebuked them for having betrayed and murdered the Just One, *they were cut to the heart, and gnashed on him with their teeth:* but when he proceeded to declare that he saw *the heavens opened, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,* in the glory of the Father; they stopped their ears, and silenced him with their clamours, and hurried him out of the city,

\* This paragraph is taken almost entirely from Bishop Horsley's Letters to Dr. Priestley, p. 232.

to inflict upon him the punishment assigned to blasphemers. As he was stoned for asserting the divine honours of his Master, so he persisted in the assertion with his dying breath. His last words were a solemn prayer to Jesus, first for himself, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*; then for his murderers, *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*. This was surely a solemn act of worship; a distinct acknowledgment that Jesus, as God, was *mighty to save*.

The force of this important testimony to the divinity of our blessed Saviour, those persons, who *reject* that doctrine, endeavour to escape in two ways. "This address of Stephen to Jesus when he actually saw him," says one of their most learned writers, "does not authorize us to offer prayers to him now he is invisible."\* But how can the circumstance of his being seen, or not seen, make the slightest difference as to the grand question, whether Jesus is an object of prayer or not? If it be not impious to adore him when he *is* seen, it cannot possibly be wrong to worship him when he is not seen; since we know, that whether we behold him or not, he is still *the same, yesterday, to-day, and for*

\* See the Improved Version of the New Testament, falsely so called.

*ever*;\* and that he is at the right hand of God. I say nothing of the probability, that Stephen did not actually see Jesus, but enjoyed a vision of him in the spirit. The other, and bolder method, by which those interpreters of Scripture try to evade the force of this argument, is to suppose, that the mind of the expiring martyr was so disordered by bodily anguish and fear, that, like Peter at the transfiguration, he knew not what he said. Can this be reconciled with the history itself? It describes his final prayer, as the deliberate act of one, who, in the midst of mortal agonies, preserved unshaken his serenity and composure; who not only contemplated his immediate dissolution without fear, but was so entirely master of himself, so collected, so mindful of his Lord's example, that he knelt down to pray for his persecutors. We assert then, that Stephen, an inspired witness to the truth of the Gospel, in the full possession of his senses, at the most awful moment of his life, in the presence of the enemies of Christ, uttered a solemn prayer to the Lord Jesus. *He* therefore believed him to be God. But so did the Apostles; for they worshipped Jesus immediately after his ascension:† and afterwards, when about

\* Heb. xiii. 8.

† Luke xxiv. 52

to ordain a successor to Judas, they addressed themselves to him in those remarkable words; *Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen.* That their prayer was addressed to Christ, is plain from the fact, that the Apostles ascribe to him the same perfection which they had frequently attributed to him while upon earth: *Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee,\** was the declaration of St. Peter. But why need we seek the aid of other arguments to prove the propriety of offering prayer to Christ, when he himself declared, *Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do?†* And shall presumptuous men withhold that tribute of humble adoration, which even the blessed angels pay to the eternal Son, of whom the Spirit declared, when he was brought into the world, *let all the angels of God worship him?‡*

I forbear on this occasion to accumulate proofs; the Scriptures abound with them: if *they* be genuine; if the Apostles were not idolaters; if the great founder of our faith *thought it not robbery to be equal with God;§*

\* John xxi. 17.

† John xiv. 13.

‡ Heb. i. 6.

§ Phil. ii. 6.

if holy Stephen did not resign his pious spirit deceiving, or self-deceived; if John was permitted to hear, in the Spirit, the voice of many angels, ascribing equal honour *to him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever;*\* then is Jesus the object of adoration *to things in heaven, and things in earth.*† As long as we receive the testimony of Scripture, we must believe, on that authority, that worship is due to the Redeemer of the world. And if there are those, who object to the Liturgy of our Church, that it directs us to offer prayers to Christ, that is an objection, which, as I read my Bible, is equally applicable to the Scriptures, upon which our faith and hopes are built.

The only individual mentioned by name, as having consented to the death of Stephen, was Saul, who signalized himself as the most active agent in the first persecution of that Church, of which he afterwards became the ornament and witness. After a brief mention of this fact in the eighth chapter of the Acts, we read, that when *Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them, the people, with one accord, gave heed unto those things which Philip spake—and there was great joy*

\* Rev. v. 11, 13.

† Phil. ii. 10.

*in that city.* It clearly appears, from our Saviour's conference with the Samaritan woman, that the people of that despised and detested country entertained, not only a strong expectation of the Messiah's advent, but far juster and more scriptural notions of his office, than their haughty neighbours. The woman said, *I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ; when he is come, he will tell us all things.* And the people of her city said to the woman, *We have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.\**

From the same chapter we may learn, that in order to obtain admission, through baptism, into the Church of Christ, faith was a necessary qualification; that is, a belief in the truth of what the first preachers of the Gospel taught concerning Christ: but not such a faith as was sufficient to *ensure* a man's salvation: for Simon the sorcerer, or, as he is most commonly called, Simon Magus, believed and was baptized; yet afterwards, when he saw that the gifts of the Holy Ghost were bestowed on those, upon whom the Apostles laid their hands, (for *all* who were baptized were not so ordained) *he offered them*

\* John iv. 25, 42.

*money*, that he might receive the same : upon which Peter rebuked him with just severity, and told him that he was *in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity*. This is a striking and indisputable proof of the truth, that a man may believe, and be judged, even by an inspired person, worthy to be made a member of Christ's Church ; and yet afterwards fall away from the faith into a state of condemnation. If it be said, that Simon never *really* believed, we have an answer in the same chapter ; for when the devout Eunuch, or chamberlain of Queen Candace, being convinced, by Philip's exposition of the prophecies, that Jesus was the Christ, enquired, *What doth hinder me to be baptized?* Philip said, *If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.\**

With respect to these early converts to the Christian faith, we find them every where spoken of, as being filled with joy and gladness, at their translation from a state of darkness into the *kingdom of Christ and of God*. And the Apostles describe themselves and the brethren, amidst tribulations and dangers, as *rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory.*† Nurtured as we have been from our early age in the principles

\* Acts viii. 37.

† 1 Pet. i. 8.

of Christianity, *we* can hardly estimate the joy and gratitude which follow such a transition. And yet, in order to appreciate the mercies of redeeming love, we ought to reflect upon the state in which we might have been, had the Gospel never been preached to us; upon the state in which many nations of the earth still are; nay, upon the state of many even of those persons, who live under the light of that Gospel, and yet have never had their hearts illumined nor purified by its beams. And if, with regard to ourselves, we do not perceive, that in principles and practice, in sentiment and hope, we are exceedingly different from what we should have been, if we had never been instructed in the truths of the Gospel; then let us look to our condition. Our baptism has been ineffectual: we have *neither part nor lot* in the gifts of the Spirit; we are still *in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity*. Let us seek to be so *renewed in the spirit of our mind*,\* and so to mark and testify that renewal by a clear line of distinction from the unconverted world, as to our opinions, and motives, and pursuits, and conversation, that we may ourselves experience, and persuade

\* Eph. iv. 23.



others to seek, the powerful influences of that Spirit working in the heart; that amidst all discouragements and difficulties we may *go on our way rejoicing*;\* and at the moment of our deliverance from the captivity of the flesh, we may look steadfastly upon Him, in whom we have trusted, and breathe out our departing soul in the words of faith and hope, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!*

\* Acts viii. 19.

## LECTURE IV.

ROM. i. 1.

*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an Apostle,  
separated unto the Gospel of God.*

IN my first Lecture on the Acts of the Apostles, I remarked that the greater part of that book is occupied with a narrative of the transactions of St. Paul. His figure stands prominently forth in the portraiture, which the sacred historian has drawn of the primitive Church of Christ; and it is in an especial degree deserving of our notice, both on account of the personal character of that great Apostle, and of the signal attestation afforded to the truth of the Gospel in his miraculous conversion. It is principally to this latter feature of his history that I propose on the present occasion to draw your attention. The subject is not new, nor is it now to be set forth with much novelty either of argument or illustration; but it may serve the purposes of

remembrance and confirmation, to compress, into the short space of a single Lecture, the principal reasons for believing that St. Paul was indeed an illustrious witness to the truth of Christianity, *called* by the crucified but glorified Saviour *to be an Apostle; separated unto the Gospel of God* by the direct interposition of its divine Author. I do this the more readily, because of late the old and often refuted objections to the character and authority of St. Paul have been repeated, with professions of respect for genuine Christianity, but, in reality, with a view to its entire destruction. That great Apostle of the Gentiles, to whom we are indebted, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, for the great body of Christian doctrine, is so powerful a witness for the truth as it is in Jesus, and so spiritual an interpreter of its doctrines, that while the authority of his writings remains entire, the philosopher and the freethinker, as they term themselves, find it impossible to pare down the Christian religion to their own standard of meagre, compromising morality: and therefore it only remains for them to attack, first his inspiration, then his veracity, and lastly his motives; and to separate his system, as they call it, of Christianity, from that of his Divine Master, and his fellow-labourers

in the Gospel. Happily, the writings of St. Paul are abundantly sufficient, at once to establish the justice of his claim to the office of an Apostle, and to show the perfect consistency and agreement of his preaching with the Gospel delivered to the Apostles by the Lord Jesus. Let us take a short survey of the history of this great teacher of Christianity: if it only serves to draw your attention to his character, as a follower and servant of our common Lord and Master, it will not be without its use.

He was born at Tarsus, a town in Cilicia, of Jewish parents, of the tribe of Benjamin. He calls himself *an Hebrew of the Hebrews*,\* that is, sprung from Hebrew parents, both on the father's and the mother's side; not having one of his parents a Gentile, as Timothy had, nor even a proselyte, but being a genuine true-born Jew. His name was originally Saul; which he exchanged for that of Paul, when he afterwards began to preach amongst the Roman colonists in Asia; probably because the latter name was more familiar to Gentile ears, to which his preaching was to be chiefly addressed, than the Hebrew *Saul*. The time of his birth is uncertain: he is described as a young man at the martyrdom of

\* Phil. iii. 5.

Stephen: he may then have been about thirty years of age; and, consequently, younger by a very few years than our blessed Lord himself. St. Paul received his education, or at least completed it, at Jerusalem; where he says that he was *brought up at the feet of Gamaliel*,\* an eminent teacher of the law; that is, was a constant attendant upon his lectures. This is a Jewish mode of expression: so we read in St. Luke, that *Mary sat at the feet of Jesus, and heard his words*. He was *taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers*; that is, was instructed in the traditional interpretation of Scripture, the only kind of learning in esteem amongst the Jews. He was, like his preceptor Gamaliel, of the sect of the Pharisees;† the chief depositaries of tradition, and the chief corrupters of the word of God.

We know nothing further of St. Paul's early life; but we are sure, from what we do know of his education, and from his own confession, that it was such as would prejudice him against the Christian faith. And his prejudices soon displayed themselves in acts of open hostility. He is first mentioned as being present at the stoning of Stephen, and as consenting unto his

\* Acts xxii. 3.

† Acts xxvi. 5.

death. *After which*, says the sacred historian, *he made havock of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison.* St. Paul afforded a striking instance of the insufficiency of conscience, unenlightened and unaided, as a guide of human life. That he acted conscientiously in persecuting the Church of Christ, there can be no doubt. He declared before Agrippa, *I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*; and he adds, that he *had punished the saints oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme* :\* and thus he fulfilled the prediction of our Saviour; *The time cometh that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth God service.* †

An interesting question arises on this part of the Apostle's history, as to the degree of sinfulness which he incurred by persecuting the Church of God, and the nature of God's mercy vouchsafed to him. But although interesting, it is not by any means necessary to be solved; for the case of Paul was, in all its bearings, a special and peculiar case: and although we are bound to be followers of him, as he also was of Jesus, it is not necessary, either for the regulation of our practice, or the

\* Acts xxvi. 9.

† John xvi. 2.

confirmation of our hopes, to determine the nature and magnitude of his sin before conversion, or the mode and kind of the divine mercy in effecting that conversion. Yet this we may safely say; that St. Paul's ignorance was culpable, when in zeal and rage he persecuted the Church of God; because there was evidence enough within his reach, to prove the truth of the Gospel, of which he did not avail himself: yet this ignorance, although sinful, lessened the malice of its effects, and disposed him towards pardon; that is, to *find* it, not to *deserve* it. Let us not, however, build upon the example of St. Paul in this respect, nor imagine that a vincible and voluntary ignorance, will render us fit objects of God's special grace. Those who will not search for the Spirit in his Word, cannot expect to feel its enlightening influence in their hearts. We do not excuse unbelief in any case; but we boldly condemn that unbelief, which declines a careful examination of the evidences of truth.

In the year following the martyrdom of Stephen, Saul received a commission from the chief council of the Jews, to go to Damascus, in search of persons professing the religion of Jesus Christ; *that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring*

*them bound unto Jerusalem.* But upon his arrival at that city, instead of executing his commission, he all at once professed himself a Christian, one of that sect which he had come thither to persecute; was baptized, and straightway preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said, Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the Chief Priests? Well might they be surprised, both Jews and Christians; the one party, that the zealous and active Pharisee, the commissioned agent of the great adversaries of the Gospel, should all at once desert his office, forsake his religion, and become an avowed defender of those notions which he had undertaken to persecute and suppress; the other, at seeing the bitter enemy, the relentless persecutor of the brethren, now ranged on their side, and encouraging them by his powerful eloquence to maintain their faith in Jesus Christ. I say, it might well surprise them: it was, in fact, a change so total, and so marvellous; so contrary to all human probability; so difficult to be accounted for on any known and ordinary principles of action, that



if we had possessed no certain information as to the causes of it, we might have said boldly, This could never have happened without a miracle. St. Paul himself has declared that his conversion *was* miraculous; and has described the manner of it in words which I need not repeat, for the history of that wonderful transaction must be familiar to you all. It is related by St. Paul himself, and by his companion St. Luke, with a substantial agreement as to facts, but with a trifling difference in the circumstances, which proves that it is no studied fabrication. It is said, in the ninth chapter of the Acts, that when the heavenly vision appeared to Saul, and Jesus spake to him from heaven, *the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man*, (it should rather be translated *hearing a sound*;) whereas, in the twenty-second chapter, St. Paul himself says, *And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid, but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me*. The two accounts, which have been cited as opposing each other, may thus be reconciled and combined: "The men who journeyed with St. Paul, saw the great light from heaven, but did not discern the form of Jesus; and heard a sound, but did

not distinguish the voice or words of Jesus." St. Paul referred to this miracle on several occasions: it seems never to have been called in question by his contemporaries. He related it, when, no doubt, some of those who accompanied him upon his journey, and witnessed it, were living.

It is only in later times that unbelievers have called in question the *cause* of St. Paul's conversion: the *reality* of it, one would have thought, was evident beyond dispute: yet even that is now denied, and his conversion to Christianity maintained to have been only an outward and pretended change. Now, if St. Paul's account of his own conversion were not true, he must have been either an impostor, or an enthusiast, self-deceiving, or deceived by others. That he was an impostor, is a supposition so improbable, that it requires a greater stretch of faith to believe it, than to admit his miraculous conversion. He could have no reasonable motive to undertake such an imposture, nor any hope of carrying it on with success. He had himself done all in his power to inflame the animosity of the chief men of the Jews against the Christians, and to beat down the religion of the cross; and he had done it with sincerity of intention; for all

his prejudices of education taught him to consider, as impious and profane, any doctrine which weakened the authority of the law of Moses; and, as he declares of himself, he *verily thought that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*. Is it credible, nay, is it possible, that such a person, in the height of his mistaken zeal, fresh from the death of the first martyr, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, having had no previous conference with an apostle or inspired teacher; should all at once, upon his journey, conceive the notion of embracing that profession, and with it persecution? That he should determine to put himself at the head of that sect, which he had till that moment regarded with contempt and aversion, is surely too absurd a proposition to be entertained. What could have been his motives? Was he in love with obloquy and persecution? Did he expect that this defection from the Jewish rulers would secure to him an unusual degree of indulgence and regard? did he imagine that the Christians had been duly prepared to receive him with cordiality, by his kind forbearance towards them?

We are told that he had formed a scheme of personal ambition: a strange ambition; to

become the leader of a detested and persecuted sect. But where are the marks and symptoms of this ambitious spirit in St. Paul? The honourable and holy ambition of converting sinners, of propagating the Gospel amongst the heathen; of saving souls unto the Lord—*that* indeed he did possess in an eminent degree. But it had no reference to his own aggrandizement or honour; for we find him declaring, that as long as true Christianity was taught, and embraced, and maintained, it was a matter of indifference to him who preached it.\* He had one object in view, the salvation of his brethren. This was not a narrow, selfish spirit, but a liberal and enlarged philanthropy; not like those philosophers, whose aim has been, not so much the investigation of truth for the general good of mankind, as the establishing of their own reputation by the display of their reasoning or eloquence; not the improvement of the world, but the establishment of a sect, to be called by their names. What is the Apostle's object? To give currency to doctrines not his own: to persuade his brethren to rely for their acceptance with God, not upon himself, but solely upon the merits of another person: to magnify, not his own name, but the

\* Phil. i. 18.

name of the Lord Jesus; disclaiming all intrinsic worthiness and ability; declaring himself the chief of sinners; professing himself ready to lay down his life, if by so doing he could prevail upon men to embrace the doctrines of the Gospel. It is impossible to conceive a line of conduct more disinterested, more demonstrative of sincerity, than this of St. Paul. Whatever opinion we may form of his character in other respects, this at least must be conceded, that he was sincere; that he was a firm believer in the doctrines which he preached with so much zeal and perseverance, in spite of so much hardship and suffering. Consider, that of those very doctrines he had once been the vehement impugner; and the implacable persecutor of all who professed them; and that the change in his sentiments and proceedings was sudden and total; consider all these points, and judge whether, according to any known principles of human action, it be possible to account for his conversion, except by acknowledging it to have been miraculous, as St. Paul himself most solemnly declared it to have been.

But supposing the Apostle to have been really and sincerely converted, and changed into a true believer, is it not possible that he may have been

an enthusiast, and that he was deceived by a heated imagination? We answer boldly, no: we discern, in the character of that great Apostle, the most ardent zeal for the cause which he had embraced; the most affectionate and heartfelt concern for the welfare of his fellow-creatures; but no enthusiasm; we see, on the contrary, abundant traces of that sound judgment and practical good sense, that accurate knowledge of mankind, and that happy accommodation of himself to the exigencies of particular situations, which are wholly incompatible with enthusiasm.

But, it will be asked, may he not have been imposed upon by others? To this question we reply—what indeed is not less applicable to the former—that if either art or enthusiasm could have made St. Paul believe that he saw an exceeding great light, surpassing that of the sun at midday, and that he heard a voice from heaven; yet certainly neither art nor enthusiasm could have persuaded him that he was blind. Besides, he was far superior in learning and natural acuteness to the Apostles, and better qualified to detect imposture; at the same time that the circumstance of his education and habits of life effectually secured him from becoming the dupe of designing men.

But if St. Paul were neither an impostor, nor imposed upon by his own enthusiasm, or by the arts of other men, we have no other alternative remaining, than to admit that the account which he gave of his conversion is a true account; and if that be admitted, it follows, as a necessary consequence, that he was indeed *a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an Apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God; and that the Gospel which he preached was not after man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.\**

To these arguments I will add only one more, but that a very important one. St. Paul asserts, in strong and unequivocal terms, that he had wrought miracles *by the power of the Spirit of God*; and he appeals to them as evidence of his Apostleship to those amongst whom he professes to have wrought them; *Truly the signs of an Apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.* Now if the Corinthians, whom he thus addressed, were sensible that no such wonderful works had been performed amongst them, such an appeal would effectually have shaken their belief in the divine commission of St. Paul. Assuredly no man in his senses, writing to persons

\* Gal. i. 11, 12.

whom he was desirous of persuading to believe him, would knowingly assert a falsehood which they must immediately detect. St. Paul therefore did perform miracles; and therefore received power from on high; and if so, his account of his own conversion must be true.

The state of the argument then is briefly this; the reality of St. Paul's conversion, whatever may have been the cause and mode of it, is proved beyond dispute by its effects. A total and wonderful change is instantaneously wrought in the affections, opinions, and proceedings of a zealous, bigoted, but at the same time learned and acute man. He becomes all at once convinced of the truth, and enlightened in the nature of those doctrines, which he had always despised and detested. He declares that he performed many miracles in the name of Jesus; and he advances this as an argument for his authority to those very persons, in whose presence he says that the miracles were performed; and a sufficient proof that he did so, is to be found in the vast numbers brought over by his ministry to embrace a faith, which was opposite to all their prejudices and their practice. St. Paul an impostor? Compare his history with that of any acknowledged impostor who ever appeared in the world, and you



must retract the suspicion. St. Paul ambitious? See him devoting his life to the service of a Master, who offered no temporal recompense but the cross, and a crown of thorns. See him striving to obtain a preeminence over the other teachers of the Gospel; but of what kind? a preeminence of suffering: *in labours more abundant; in stripes above measure; in prisons more frequent; in deaths oft;*\* encountering every kind of danger; proclaiming the doctrines of the Gospel at the imminent hazard of his life; driven from city to city; assaulted by the people; punished by their rulers; scourged, beaten, stoned; yet still unwearied in his exertions for the salvation of mankind: not remaining in any place to be the head of a political party; but planting the Gospel, and then proceeding to enlighten other countries; and strictly charging his converts to pay an implicit and conscientious obedience to the existing powers; and to make this a part of the duty which they owed to God. See him disclaiming, in the most solemn and pathetic language, all merit and praise for himself, and preaching, with all the eloquence of sincerity, patience, humility, meekness, mutual forgiveness, self-denial, holiness of life. Is this ambition?

\* 2 Cor. xi. 23.

is it imposture? is it self-delusion? If it be, I could almost say—what has been said with more zeal than judgment in a less sacred cause—I had rather err with St. Paul, than think rightly with his opponents and traducers.

Compare the conduct of that great Apostle with that of the unbeliever; the one earnestly and affectionately persuading mankind to the profession of a religion, which, if it be true, will secure their eternal welfare; and if not, will at all events ensure their present rectitude of conduct and tranquillity of mind: the other, not content with being himself tossed in an ocean of uncertainty and doubt; but labouring to shake the pious confidence of others, and to bereave them of their dearest hopes; to take from them their only stay and support in the conflicts of the flesh with the Spirit; to fill them with anxious surmisings and fearful forebodings in this life; and to ensure their condemnation if there be another. To which of these characters, my brethren, shall we, as reasonable and accountable beings, desire to assimilate our own? Shall we, with the heartless and unfeeling sceptic, scoff at what he is pleased to term the reigning superstition? Shall we deprive our simpler brethren of the satisfaction which they feel, in believing that

Jesus died to make atonement for their sins, and that *as he died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus shall God bring with him?*\* Shall we see Christianity beaten down, and wounded, and trampled upon, and pass by unconcerned on the other side? Or shall we rather *count all things loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord;*† and, under a full conviction of its inestimable value, not only embrace it heartily ourselves, but, for the sake of others, *earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints?*‡ Of this at least we may be assured; that if we maintain the truth and authority of the Gospel, and strengthen the kingdom of Christ upon earth, both by our precept and example, we shall have the satisfaction of knowing that we can do no harm to the real interests of mankind, and most probably shall do incalculable good.

In the last place I may remark, that St. Paul has been regarded by some pious and learned men, as a type of the Jewish nation, both in his unbelieving and his converted state. He was, as I have before observed, in the strictest and fullest sense of the term, a Jew; by birth, by education, by zeal for the law. Nor did he,

\* 1 Thess. iv. 14.

† Phil. iii. 8.

‡ Jude 3.

when he became an Apostle, cast off all affection for his Jewish brethren, but declared that he was willing to perish for them:\* but they were obstinate and immovable; and therefore he turned from them to the Gentiles, declaring at the same time that there was a day predetermined in the counsels of God for their restoration and reception into the Church of Christ.† He persecuted and oppressed Jesus Christ, and was struck blind; but upon repentance he received his sight. So were the Jews, for their obstinate hardness of heart, stricken with a judicial blindness of understanding; *and even unto this day the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.*‡

But St. Paul was converted by a special interposition of divine power, and by the glorious manifestation of Christ himself: it may be—and beyond that we do not venture, for it is one of the hidden counsels of God—it may be, that the conversion and illumination of the Jews, when *the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in*, will be sudden, and with power.

Many reflections crowd upon my mind, when I view in all its bearings the conversion of the

\* Rom. ix. 3. † Rom. xi. 25. ‡ 2 Cor. iii. 15.

great Apostle of the Gentiles. But I can now only submit to you one of the most important. The example of St. Paul is sometimes urged, as a ground of confidence, either to hope for the sudden conversion of notorious sinners; or to encourage the sinners themselves, when they resolve to forsake their sins. But in point of fact it is not a legitimate argument in either case. It is a case which ought to be set aside, and contemplated with admiration, as a special instance of the wonderful way, in which God sometimes accomplishes his great designs. The question itself cannot now be discussed; but this I may say, that although we do not pretend to limit the efficacy of God's grace, or to say that it cannot turn a sinner at any moment of his life from the error of his ways, or that such conversions never happen; yet the instance of St. Paul is not applicable to the case of a professing Christian, who sins against the light and the obligations of the Gospel. St. Paul was a religious man, serving God to the best of his knowledge and judgment; mistaken, but sincere; zealous for the honour of God, and of the religion which he believed to be true: and therefore his case bears little or no analogy to that of an immoral Christian, or a careless unbeliever.

Besides, his was truly an extraordinary case. His conversion was to be a striking proof of Christianity; he was an instrument specially required for a particular purpose; and therefore God thought fit to employ special means for appropriating him to himself. The salvation of the Gentile world was wrapped up in the conversion of St. Paul. But unless an object of equal importance is to be answered, we cannot with certainty argue, from this case, that a special conversion may be looked for beforehand in any other. With more assurance of reason, and under a more constraining necessity, may we pray to Him, who manifested his power in so wonderful and singular a change, that the ordinary means of grace which he employs, his word, and ordinances, and the ready aid of the Spirit, may be inquired after by the Christian world with greater earnestness of affection, and used with more of diligence and perseverance; that we may be gradually, yet effectually *transformed by the renewing of our mind*;\* and exhibit in our practice the purifying, and strengthening, and supporting influence of that grace, which is given to every one of us according to the measure of his faith in Jesus Christ.

\* Rom. xii. 2.

## LECTURE V.

ROM. i. 5.

*By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name.*

AFTER the conversion of St. Paul to the faith which he had before opposed and persecuted, he began immediately to assert the Messiahship of Jesus, to the amazement and confusion of the Jews who dwelt at Damascus. They had expected to find in him an active and powerful ally; but when, contrary to their expectations, *he preached Christ in their synagogues, they took counsel to kill him, and watched the gates of the city day and night.\** Then, says the sacred historian, *the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.* This is written in the twenty-fifth verse of the ninth

\* They watched them by means of the soldiers of Aretas, the king of Arabia, as St. Paul informs us in the eleventh chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians.

chapter; and the twenty-sixth verse speaks of Saul as being come to Jerusalem. But there was an interval of three years, of which, although St. Luke passes it over in silence, St. Paul himself has given an account in his Epistle to the Galatians: *when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood; neither went I up to Jerusalem, to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem, to see Peter; and abode with him fifteen days: but other of the apostles saw I none, save James, the Lord's brother.\**

Upon his arrival at Jerusalem, the brethren were all afraid of him; and believed not that he was a disciple. His three years' seclusion in Arabia, during which time they had heard nothing of him, probably led them to disbelieve the reality of that conversion which had, no doubt, been reported to them at the time when it happened. But Barnabas, with whom Saul appears to have had some previous acquaintance,

\* Gal. i. 15—19.



*took him, and brought him to the Apostles;\** that is, to Peter and James, whom alone, he declares, that he then saw; as being probably the only Apostles at that time in Jerusalem. And there, while *he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians,* (that is, the Jews who were natives of Grecian cities, as St. Paul himself was, and who usually spoke the Greek language,) *they went about to slay him:* but being rescued by the brethren, he was safely conveyed to Cesarea, and thence to Tarsus, his native city. And there also we may suppose him to have executed the office of an Apostle, in preaching the Gospel to his own immediate countrymen; for in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts, the Apostles are said to have written to the brethren which were of the Gentiles in Cilicia; and Paul is described as going through Syria and Cilicia, *confirming the Churches,* which had before been founded there.† But he preached the Gospel at that time to the Jews, and not to the Gentile inhabitants of Asia; for it was reserved to another Apostle, to open a door of admission into the Church of Christ, to those who were not the seed of Abraham, nor the children of promise.

\* Acts ix. 27.

† Acts xv. 23, 41.

The part which was assigned to St. Peter, in the great work of planting the Gospel in the world, deserves to be distinctly considered. His portrait stands conspicuously forward with that of St. Paul, in the narrative of St. Luke: but it is also very prominent in the history of our Saviour's ministry.

Peter was the first disciple of our Lord who expressed a sense of his own sinfulness, and, at the first bidding of Jesus, *forsook all and followed him*. In his house Jesus resided at Capernaum: for him he paid the tribute money. Both St. Matthew and St. Mark assign to him the post of honour among his brethren; *Now the names of the twelve Apostles are these; the first, Simon, who is called Peter.\** The angel said to the women, at the sepulchre, *Go your way, tell his disciples and Peter.†* It was he, who on all occasions was the foremost to testify his faith and affection. None of the Apostles, but Peter, ventured to quit the ship and walk upon the sea: and, lastly, it was Peter, who first professed a belief, not only in the Messiahship, but in the divine nature of Christ. When our Lord, having heard from his Apostles the various opinions which the Jews entertained respecting

\* Matt. x. 2.

† Mark xvi. 7.

himself, put to them the question, *But whom say ye that I am?* no one seems to have been prepared with an answer but Peter. He replied—and very remarkable are his words—*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.\** For that revelation of the vital, but mysterious doctrine of the Gospel, Peter was qualified by his distinguishing peculiarities of disposition, which attracted the special notice and regard of his blessed Lord; a more zealous warmth of attachment, a more lively faith, a more fearless courage, than seem to have been possessed by his brethren. We find him generally mentioned by the Evangelists in company with John, *the disciple whom Jesus loved.* These two were present at the transfiguration,† and in the garden at Gethsemane:‡ they were sent to prepare the last paschal supper:§ they followed their Master, when arrested, to the palace of the High Priest:‖ they went together to the sepulchre;¶ and, in the history of the Acts, these two went

\* Matt. xvi. 16, 17. Comp. John vi. 69. † Matt. xvii. 2.

‡ Matt. xxvi. 37.

§ Luke xxii. 8.

‖ John xviii. 15.

¶ John xx. 3.

into the temple at the hour of prayer,\* and were sent by the other Apostles into Samaria, to preach the Gospel :† so that, as an ancient father has well observed, they appear to have had a great similarity of disposition,‡ and were justly looked upon as the chief of the apostolic college.

I cannot but pause for a moment, to direct your attention to those dispositions and affections, which secured to these two disciples an honourable preeminence in the regard of their heavenly Master. Not superior learning, nor eloquence, nor sagacity; but a tender and a zealous heart; a heart prepared to love the Lord for his goodness, to devote itself entirely to his service, to take him for its all; to *think all things loss* for the excellency of that possession; and not to be *separated from the love of him* by any of the terrors, or the pleasures of the world.

But Peter had the advantage over his companion in zeal and resolution, as well as in maturity of age. He was on all occasions the spokesman of his brethren, during the ministry of Christ; and, after his ascension, it was Peter, who proposed the election of an Apostle into the place of Judas, and addressed the multitude, on

\* Acts iii. 1.

† Acts viii. 14.

‡ Chrysostom.

the day of Pentecost, in that striking and persuasive discourse, which gained over to the Church three thousand souls. And when he had gone up with John into the temple to pray, it was he, and not John, who, without hesitation or doubt, bade the cripple rise up and walk, and performed the first miracle wrought by an Apostle after the effusion of the Holy Spirit.\* And through the history of the Acts, down to the conversion of Saul, St. Peter is the leading person, both as to preaching, and working miracles. We may thus discover, in the character and labours of that eminent Apostle, sufficient reason for acquiescing in the natural and obvious interpretation of our Saviour's prophetic designation of him, as the foundation of his Church; *I say unto thee, that thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it:*† that is, "I say unto thee, that thou art indeed, as thy name imports, a Rock: and upon this rock I will build my Church." The natural and obvious interpretation of this promise is also the true one: nor would it have been deserted, had not the earlier Protestant divines been over anxious to get rid of an argu-

\* Acts iii. 6.

† Matt. xvi. 18.

ment, which was drawn from this text by the assertors of the papal supremacy. We may thus paraphrase it; "As thou hast professed to me a firm belief in the most important doctrine of the Gospel, by declaring, Thou art Christ, the Anointed, the Son of the living God; in like manner I say also unto thee, Thou art, as thy name importeth, a rock; firm and unshaken in faith and love; and upon this rock will I build my Church; the first foundations of which, after my departure into glory, shall be laid by and through thee; and against that Church not all the powers of darkness shall prevail."

This explanation of our Saviour's words agrees with historical truth. It does in fact appear, from the sacred historian, that Peter may justly be said to have laid, under Christ, the first foundations of that universal Church, which was destined to embrace all mankind within the pale of divine mercy. By the preaching of Peter, the first eight thousand Jewish converts were added to the infant Church of Christ; and although, by reason of the magnitude of the task, Paul was miraculously called and set apart, to deliver the word of salvation to the idolatrous Gentiles, and is therefore commonly designated the great Apostle of the Gentiles; yet it was Peter, by

whose ministry the *wall of partition* between Jew and Gentile was first *broken down*, when the devout Cornelius and his household were baptized. He first declared to the Apostles and brethren, who doubted, when they heard of that transaction, that *God had granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life* : \* and all this took place before the Holy Ghost had directed the Apostles to *separate Barnabas and Paul for the work whereunto he had called them*. † Accordingly Peter himself declared, in the apostolic council at Jerusalem, *Men and brethren, ye know, how that a good while ago God made choice amongst us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the Gospel and believe* ; ‡ a distinct assertion of the priority of his own claim to that of any other Apostle, as the founder of Christ's Church amongst the Gentiles. Yet he was only the founder; the opener, as it were, of the divine commission to those, who had renounced idolatry, and worshipped the true God, although not according to all the forms of the Jewish religion. The extensive propagation of Gospel truth amongst the more distant Gentile tribes, was certainly the office and work of St. Paul. *The Gospel of the uncircumcision*, he

\* Acts xi. 18.

† Acts xiii. 2.

‡ Acts xv. 7.

says, *was committed unto me, as the Gospel of the circumcision was to Peter*.\* Both, however, preached the same Gospel; and although, even in their own age, some affected to say, *I am of Paul*, and others, *I am of Cephas*;† and in later days some have pretended to find a disagreement in doctrine between these great Apostles; yet by *them* certainly *Christ* was not *divided*,‡ nor his Gospel otherwise preached, than in unity of doctrine, and singleness of intention, under the influence of the same Spirit of truth, and blessed with equal success.

But here occurs a question of considerable interest, which concerns the character of all the Apostles, as inspired teachers. How is it, that although they believed themselves to have received the gifts of the Spirit, they remained ignorant of that mystery of the Gospel, that *the door of faith* was to be *opened to the Gentiles*,§ till it had been revealed to Peter in a particular vision?

Now our Saviour's promise to his Apostles was, that the Spirit should *guide them into all truth*;|| conduct them by degrees, as occasion required, to a knowledge of those parts of the Christian dispensation, of which, during their

\* Gal. ii. 7.            † 1 Cor. i. 12.            † 1 Cor. i. 13.

§ Act xiv. 27.            || John xvi. 13.



Master's life-time, they had no understanding. The process of spiritual illumination was not instantaneous, nor all at once complete. It was not requisite that the Apostles should be certified of a doctrine, before the time arrived, at which the economy of revelation required its promulgation.

A more remarkable difficulty occurs, in the disagreement between some of the Apostles themselves, respecting the lawfulness of eating with the Gentiles. *When Peter was come to Antioch*, says St. Paul to the Galatians,\* *I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.* This passage is greatly relied on by the Socinians, as furnishing an insuperable objection to the notion of apostolical inspiration. But the difficulty vanishes, if we consider the true and proper objects of spiritual illumination, which are, the doctrinal and moral features of revelation, and not unessential points of outward discipline and economy: a distinction, which corresponds with the importance attached to either branch of

\* Gal. ii. 11.

religion by Him who was the author of it; and which should be carefully kept in mind by all who are called upon to preach it; that they may not lay a greater stress upon the circumstances, than upon the essence of Christianity. In St. Peter's secession from the tables of his Gentile converts, inconsistent as it might be with that plainness and simplicity of right intention, which never sacrifices to convenience even the appearance of truth, no vital doctrine of the Gospel was compromised. It was a question of expediency, which human prudence was competent to decide, and for the solution of which there was no need of immediate inspiration. One Apostle, it is true, judged wrongly; but another was able to set him right. In point of principle and intention there was no difference between them.

As the Scriptures do not require, so neither do they authorise us to believe, that the Apostles were so inspired, as to be wholly free from error, in things not material to the effectual execution of their mission. But that they received, by the immediate communications of the Spirit of truth, a more perfect knowledge of the plan and doctrines of the Gospel, which they so little comprehended during their Master's life; that

they were enabled to develop the mysteries of redemption with all the certainty of divine authority; that they were guarded from error in all points which could affect the purity and perfectness of the faith delivered to the saints, or the integrity and stability of the Church; this kind and degree of inspiration we claim for the first preachers of the Gospel, and the proofs of it lie on the surface of the Sacred Volume, which records their labours in the cause of Christ.

The prominent station, occupied in that record by the two great Apostles Peter and Paul, has naturally led me to consider their relation to each other, and to illustrate the history of the Apostles by these general remarks. I will now return to the history itself, and notice, but necessarily with greater brevity than such interesting subjects demand, some of its most remarkable features.

We find Peter saying to the bedridden man who was sick of the palsy, *Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.\** The form of words deserves especial notice. Jesus Christ wrought miraculous cures of his own authority: the Apostles wrought them in *his* name, expressly disclaiming all power

\* Acts. ix. 34.

and holiness of their own. What is the inference? That if the Apostles were inspired and divinely commissioned teachers, Jesus Christ was something more.\* But there is another conclusion to be drawn from these words; namely, that the Apostles had no views of personal ambition; that they were intent upon magnifying, not their own interest or reputation, but the name of Jesus, and the honour of the Gospel, for the good of mankind.

Let all, who are ministers of that Gospel, learn a lesson of humility and disinterestedness from the conduct of these holy men. If it has pleased the Lord to bless their ministry with success; if they have been enabled to say with effect to one slave of sin, or of the world, "Arise, be made whole;" let them ascribe the praise where it is due; and while they feel a natural joy in the thought of having been instruments of glorifying the Gospel, and converting a sinner to the Lord, let them add, *yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*†

I have already remarked, that Cornelius and his family were the first-fruits of that great harvest of the Gentiles, which the Lord had

\* See the Second Lecture on St. John's Gospel.

† 1 Cor. xv. 10.

determined to gather into the garner of his Church. But Cornelius, before his conversion, worshipped the true God, and served him with sincere intention of heart. He was one of the persons called Proselytes, who had forsaken the errors and abominations of idolatry, and worshipped Jehovah, as he was set forth in the Scriptures of the Old Testament; but not according to the ritual of the Mosaic law; being neither circumcised, nor pledged to other outward observances than those, which are specified in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts; *to abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication.* These persons are called, in the Acts of the Apostles, *religious proselytes*; or, as the words properly mean, *worshipping proselytes*: so in the fifteenth and seventeenth chapters, where *devout women, devout Greeks*, are spoken of, the literal rendering is, *worshipping*; that is, worshipping the true God.

It was natural, and, if we may without presumption use the word, it was proper, that in the fulfilment of God's gracious purposes towards the Gentile world, the Gospel should first be offered to those, who stood midway, as it were, between the dominions of the prince of this

world, and the enclosure of God's peculiar people; who were exempt from the gross and superstitious errors of the heathen, and from the narrow-minded prejudices of the Jews.

What a reproach is the character of Cornelius to many professors of the Gospel! Uninstructed in the way of salvation, yet believing in the existence and providence of one true God, he *feared him, and gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always*. Perhaps he trusted too much in his alms and his prayers: but uninformed as he was in the necessity and nature of justification by Jesus Christ, his sincerity of intention was so far available, as to render him a fit object for a call to faith and grace. *Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God*. Thus were strikingly exemplified those sayings of our Saviour, *no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father*.\*—And, *if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God*.†

Let me direct your attention to one feature in the commendation bestowed upon the good centurion, one ingredient in that piety, which called down so signal a blessing upon him and

\* John vi. 65.

† John vii. 17.

his; *he feared God* WITH ALL HIS HOUSE. O that careless Christians would learn to read their own condemnation in the practice of this devout Gentile! More especially, let masters and heads of families consider, if the pious centurion was able to bring his household to the true God; if holy Joshua could pledge himself, *as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,\** what excuse is there for *them*, if religion, with all the additional motives, and aids, and comforts of the Christian revelation, be not made by them a matter of domestic interest and care?

*When the Apostles and brethren in Judea heard that the Gentiles had received the word of God,†* some of them found fault with Peter, for having eaten with those who were uncircumcised: but upon his relating to them the divine communication which he had received, and the descent of the Spirit upon the new converts, they at once dismissed their prejudices, with the sincerity of devout and humble seekers after truth; and, divesting themselves of all national jealousy, they rejoiced, in the true spirit of evangelical charity, at this enlargement of the divine mercy; and *glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

\* Josh. xxiv. 15.

† Acts x. 1.

It is deserving of remark, that when certain, who had been converted by the preaching of some brethren, not Apostles, believed and turned unto the Lord, and manifested forth the effects of his grace, the Apostles thought it necessary to confirm them in the faith which they had embraced, by special instruction from themselves; and the exhortation which Barnabas gave to them was this; *that with purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord.\** It can never be too strongly impressed upon all who *would* receive, or think that they *have* received, the Gospel, that the root of true effectual faith is in the heart; that there must be a determination of purpose, a singleness of intention, a directness of view, a bending of the heart to God, a longing for his grace, and for a closer acquaintance with his will and his love: for all this, at least, is comprehended in the expression of cleaving unto the Lord with purpose of heart.

The blessing of God attended the preaching of Barnabas; *for, says St. Luke, he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added to the Lord.†* Having brought Saul from Tarsus to Antioch, they continued their labours there for a year, and *taught*

\* Acts xi. 23.

† Acts xi. 26.



*much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.\** It is extremely probable, both from the nature of the case, and from the expression of King Agrippa to Paul, *almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian*, as well as that of St. Peter, *If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed*;† that this name was given to the believers by the enemies of the Gospel, perhaps by the haughty Romans, as a term of reproach or contempt. But now, while the name of *Jew* denotes an unhappy race of outcasts and wanderers; while that of *Greek* bespeaks an oppressed, and persecuted, and, unhappily, a superstitious and immoral people; while the once proud name of *Roman* is confined, as a national appellation, to the people of a ruined and defenceless city; that of *Christian* is a high and holy distinction, not depending upon casual locality, nor upon the will of men, a name, in which the civilized world rejoices and exults; and which, in every nation, and in every condition of life, may be made, by the grace of God, a title to the *inheritance of the saints in light*.

It will be impossible for me, in the present course of Lectures, to touch upon all those

\* Acts xxvi. 28.

† 1 Pet. iv. 16.

points in the Acts of the Apostles, which present to the Christian reader materials for instruction and improvement. I intend to devote my next and concluding Lecture to a summary review of the subjects which have been separately considered. In the mean time, let us pray to the great Author of light and truth, that by these, and by all the different methods of setting forth his Word, his great purposes in the Gospel may be advanced. May we be excited, by a near and careful consideration of the doctrines and example of those holy men, who planted that Gospel in the world, to be *followers of them, as they also were of Christ*;\* and may we obtain a portion of the same Spirit which descended abundantly into their hearts, to make us worthy of that holy name, by which we are distinguished as the redeemed of the Lord.

\* 1 Cor. xi. 1.

## LECTURE VI.

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### ACTS xvi. 5.

*And so were the Churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.*

I HAVE now considered the points to be noticed by the Christian reader, in the eleven first chapters of the Acts of the Apostles: the first foundation of that Church, which was built upon the rock of faith in a crucified Redeemer; and the first opening of its doors to the Gentiles. We have seen the Apostles comforted, and assured, and partially enlightened by the conversation of their Lord after his resurrection; animated and rejoiced at the glorious spectacle of his ascension; yet not regarding themselves as qualified to enter upon the discharge of that high commission, which had been entrusted to them, of preaching the Gospel to all nations, till the place of their departed Master should be supplied by the promised Paraclete. We have

seen them waiting quietly for the fulfilment of that promise, and then manifesting its fulfilment, in the display of superhuman knowledge and power; no longer the timid, prejudiced, unenlightened fishermen of Galilee; but the fearless, eloquent, successful advocates and champions of the Gospel: yet not eloquent *with enticing words of man's wisdom*,\* but with the heavenly simplicity of truth, enforced by signs and wonders, *in demonstration of the Spirit, and in power*. We have seen also effects corresponding to such agency; numerous conversions to the truth, evinced not only by an outward profession of faith, and the washing of water in baptism, but by the plentiful fruits of the Spirit, *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith*;† an ardent and a self-denying charity; a resolute and immovable allegiance to Christ and to his cause.

We have also seen the zealous, but mistaken Pharisee, the cruel persecutor of the Church of Christ, instantaneously converted; transformed into its most active and powerful defender; and, after a certain period of probation, separated by the Holy Ghost for the work of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. The persecution, which he had once so actively carried on against

\* 1 Cor. ii. 4.

† Gal. v. 22.

others, he was now destined to encounter himself; and as he is first introduced into the history of the Apostles, as consenting to the death of Stephen, so the first severe trial to which he himself was exposed, was at the hands of *certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people of Lystra, and having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.*\* And this leads me to remark, that as Jesus Christ invited disciples to follow him, by the promise of an eternal recompense hereafter, coupled with the certain assurance of trials and persecutions in the present life,—a sure indication that he was no deceiver; so the Apostles, far from luring men to the profession of the Gospel, by holding out to them a prospect of temporal emolument or enjoyment, uniformly described that profession, as the handmaid of suffering and sorrow in the present world; as offering to its votaries a crown of thorns in the flesh, a crown of glory only in a distant and future kingdom. Paul and Barnabas are described as *confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith: and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*† How persuasive and convincing must have been

\* Acts xiv. 19.

† Acts xiv. 22.

that preaching, which was of power to confirm the faith and constancy of the poor persecuted disciples of Jesus, not with assurances of profit or pleasure, but with prophetic warnings of sorrow and affliction! and what was the foundation and the end of that preaching? simply Christ; Christ crucified and glorified; the one sufficient Saviour, Mediator, Intercessor, and Judge: preaching, which *to the Jews was a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them that were called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.\**

He was “the power of God,” inasmuch as he was *declared to be the Son of God with power,†* by the demonstration of the Spirit, in the miracles wrought by himself and his Apostles; and in the astonishing effects produced by their preaching, the rapid conversion of multitudes, and the infusion of supernatural wisdom and firmness into their hearts. He was “the wisdom of God,” inasmuch as by a simple declaration of the certainty and conditions of the Gospel covenant, a few naturally ignorant and simple men were enabled to confound and put to silence the wisest disputers of this world, and to work that change in the sentiments and affections of those who

\* 1 Cor. i. 23.

† Rom. i. 4.

heard them, which all the philosophy and eloquence of this world had never been able to effect: *God having chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things that were mighty; and base things of the world and things which are despised, did God choose, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.\**

It is however to be remarked, that although none of the Apostles was more strictly and exclusively a preacher of Christ crucified, or more entirely despised the wisdom of this world, as set in competition with the knowledge of Christ, than St. Paul; yet he was far from disdaining to avail himself, in arguing both with Jews and Greeks, of the aids afforded him by his acquaintance with the learning of either people. But he did not rely upon it, as though it were *the sword of the Spirit*; he did not trust to it as an effectual instrument of conversion; *for Christ sent him to preach the Gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.*† But he laboured, *with great plainness of speech,*‡ not only to satisfy men's reason, but

\* 1 Cor. i. 27.    † 1 Cor. i. 17.    ‡ 2 Cor. iii. 12.

to affect their hearts with a conviction of their own sinful and helpless state; the necessity of an atonement; the sufficiency of that satisfaction which had been made by the blood-shedding of Jesus Christ; the indispensableness of an exclusive reliance on his merits; the need, and efficacy, and abundance of God's free grace. By *manifestation* of these *truths* did the Apostles *commend themselves*, and the Gospel which they preached, *to every man's conscience in the sight of God.\** By such exhortations as these *were the Churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.†* And such must be the preaching of every minister of that Gospel, who desires to make it effectual to the conversion of sinners, to the enlargement and confirmation of the Church. It is right and proper, that we should employ all the talents which God has implanted in us, all the resources which he has enabled us to acquire, in endeavouring to gain the attention, and to interest the feelings of a careless or a fastidious world: but a practical change in their sentiments and affections, is to be wrought only by the native and simple energy of Gospel truth, set forth with scriptural plainness and force. While the flashes of human eloquence play around the

\* 2 Cor. iv. 2.

† Acts xvi. 5.



imagination, or the riches of human learning surprise and confound the understanding, it is only the pure and perfect word of God, *quick and powerful*, and *sharper than any two-edged sword*,\* which finds its way to the heart and conscience, and awakens them to that solemn self-inquiry, *What must I do to be saved?*†

With respect to the order in which the Gospel was preached to different people, it appears, from the Acts of the Apostles, that it was first delivered, according to our Saviour's command, to the Jews; many thousands of whom were immediately converted to the faith: secondly, to the Samaritans, who worshipped the true God, but rejected the Scriptures of the Old Testament, with the exception of the books of Moses; who yet were in expectation of the Messiah's advent: then to the proselytes, or Gentile worshippers of the true God, in the person of Cornelius and his family: and, lastly, by the ministry of Paul, to those nations, who were altogether *aliens*, not only *from the commonwealth of Israel*,‡ but *from the life of God, through the ignorance that was in them*;§ who had *changed the truth of God into a lie, and*

\* Heb. iv. 12.

† Eph. ii. 12.

† Acts xvi. 30.

§ Eph. iv. 18.

*worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.\**

The Church having first been founded and established in Jerusalem, the Apostles proceeded to preach the glad tidings of salvation to all nations, in obedience to their Lord's command. Of the Churches which they planted throughout the Gentile world, a few only are mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. Of the labours and journeyings of those holy men, with the exception of that brief memorial, no authentic record remains: but the fact is one of historical certainty, that within a few years after the commencement of their ministry, the Gospel had been preached to almost every country and province of the known world. It appears, that the Apostles themselves did not sojourn long in any place; but having converted a sufficient number of persons to form a Church, or assembly of believers, they ordained presbyters, or elders, to teach and guide it after their departure; retaining to themselves the power of making such ordinances and regulations, as circumstances might require; and, in the case of more distant Churches, from which a reference to their authority might be difficult and inconvenient, they

\* Rom. i. 25.

appointed, during their life-time, pious and faithful men, to exercise that authority over the Church, and all its members, both teachers and hearers. Such was Titus in Crete, who was left there by Paul, that he should *set in order all things that were wanting, and ordain elders in every city.*\* Such also, during the life-time of at least one Apostle, were the angels, or bishops, of the seven Churches in Asia, to whom, as to the presidents and rulers of those Churches, were sent the solemn warnings of the Spirit.†

Every separate Church had its presbyter, whom St. Paul terms its *ruler, guide, and overseer*. In the twentieth chapter of Acts he is said, while at Miletus, to have sent to Ephesus for the elders of the Church; and that these were the teachers, not merely of the Church at Ephesus, but of other Churches in that part of Asia, appears from his expression in the twenty-fifth verse; *And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone, preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.* And as to the authority of any member of a Church to constitute himself a teacher, we may ask, why did St. Paul send, not for the members at large

\* Tit. i. 5.

† Rev. i. 20.

of the Ephesian Churches, nor for such of them as chose to come, but simply for the elders, whom he charged *to feed the Church of God, over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers?*

It may be not irrelevant to remark, that in that affecting valediction of the Apostle to his Ephesian friends and children in the Lord, not a word is said of their being accountable to Peter, as the chief of the apostolic college, or as the universal bishop; although, had such a supremacy been contemplated, St. Paul's impressive warning to them, to be on their guard against the false teachers who were to arise from among themselves, would surely have been accompanied with a reference to that supposed paramount and infallible authority.

Let us now survey the primitive Church of Christ, as it is pourtrayed in the annals of its earliest age. Planted as it was by the immediate ambassadors of Christ, and watered by the extraordinary dews of the Spirit, its miraculous growth bespeaking the special providence of God, it is not, perhaps, in all respects to be regarded as a pattern, or model of discipline, from which no deviation could be lawful in after times; yet in its leading features, both

as to the spirit which informed it, and the wisdom which prescribed its economy, it remains for ever an object of imitation.

First, as to its structure, it was *the household of God—built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.\** Here again we find no allusion to Peter, as being singly the rock of foundation to the Church of Christ; but the preaching of the Apostles, and the strict agreement of the Gospel with the prophecies; that is, in fact, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament: these are the foundations, on which that glorious structure rests: and whatever part of the visible Church is not directly built thereupon, is not an integral nor essential part of that Church: but whatever part is built upon the *hay and stubble* of traditions, as opposed to, or incompatible with those foundations, may be propped up for a time by the devices of human builders, but must at the last be *made manifest, of what sort it is.†*

As to the persons, who occupied the different departments in the rising household of God, and laboured together in the work of edification, we read that *He gave some Apostles, and some*

\* Eph. ii. 19, 20.

† 1 Cor. iii. 12.

*prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.\** The different orders, and the different kinds of spiritual gifts, are elsewhere variously described by St. Paul: and it is not easy for us to determine with precision their number or nature: but we may collect that the Apostles were distinguished above all the rest, by a preeminence of authority, of spiritual gifts and powers. Next in order were the Prophets, inspired men, who were enabled by the Spirit to declare to the assembled believers the meaning of the Scriptures, to pray, and exhort with power, and sometimes to foretel future events. Then Evangelists, whose office it was to preach Christ to the people; that is, to relate his miracles, and to explain the nature of that atonement which he had made for the sins of mankind. Such certainly was Philip the Evangelist, who is described as preaching Christ to the Samaritans; and to the devout Eunuch is said to have preached Jesus, † taking for his text that remarkable prophecy of Isaiah, which described the humiliation and death of the Messiah.

\* Eph. iv. 11.

† Acts viii. 35.

As the prophets were probably of the presbyters, so the deacons might be evangelists; while some, who enforced perhaps the moral duties of the Gospel, or superintended the general course of instruction given to the flock of Christ, might be called pastors or teachers. The term Pastor was certainly applicable both to the Apostles and to presbyters: for Jesus Christ had charged Peter, and his brethren in him, in that earnest injunction, thrice repeated, *Feed my sheep*;\* and with equal earnestness did St. Paul enjoin the elders from Ephesus, *to feed the Church of God, which he had purchased with his own blood*.† May all those, to whom *is committed a dispensation of the Gospel*,‡ ever bear in mind the sacredness of their pastoral relation to the flock which they are appointed to feed, and the account which they must one day render of their trust, *when the chief Shepherd shall appear*!§ I speak of them, as being *appointed* to feed the flock. If one thing be plainer than another in the history of the early Church, it is this; that the teachers and guides of the people in spiritual things, call them by what name you may, were neither self-constituted, nor chosen

\* John xxi. 16.

† 1 Cor. ix. 17.

† Acts xx. 28.

§ 1 Pet. v. 4.

by the people, but appointed by the Apostles, and those to whom the Apostles delegated the right of choosing. It was only with reference to the secular part of the deacon's office, as relating to matters of which all were competent judges, that the disciples at large were required to select seven; to whom the Apostles gave authority.

This is but a brief, imperfect sketch of the ministerial economy of the primitive Church. As to the body of the people, they lived in the unity of the faith, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. Imbued with the doctrines of the Gospel, pure from the fountain head; replenished with the gracious influences of the Spirit; raised above the world; they *adorned the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things*;\* and set forward the cause of the Gospel, by displaying its blessed influence on themselves. To sell all their worldly goods, and give to the poor, where need required; to look upon their possessions as the common property of the Church, when the necessities of the brethren demanded a free ministration of their means; to pray for their enemies; to render blessing for cursing; to pay a conscientious obedience to the *powers*

\* Tit. ii. 10.



*ordained of God*; these were the earliest symptoms and results of Christian charity and love. Steadfastness in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship; a punctual and religious attendance upon the teaching and ministry of those, who were *over them in the Lord*; a devout observance of the sacramental ordinance instituted by the Saviour himself; constant and fervent prayer; the regular assembling of themselves together, for the purposes of common worship and mutual edification; a careful searching of the Scriptures; the singing of *psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with grace in their hearts, to the Lord*;\* these were the tokens and expressions of piety amongst the primitive believers. The most wonderful gifts of the Spirit were possessed and exercised (with few exceptions) not for the gratification of personal vanity, but for the furtherance of the Gospel cause. The most consummate wisdom in spiritual things was co-existent, as indeed it always will be, with the most perfect meekness, humility, and self-renunciation.

The Apostles, and evangelists, and teachers of the Church, secured to themselves the affection and respect of the people, not merely by the

\* Col. iii. 16.

display of their miraculous powers, the healing of diseases, and the gift of tongues; but by their sufferings in the Gospel cause; by their earnest and disinterested concern for the eternal welfare of their brethren in the Lord; by their willingness *to spend and be spent* for their sakes;\* by the simplicity of heart and singleness of purpose, which ruled and characterized all their proceedings, as men, bent upon saving souls to the Lord. How affecting is that appeal of the great Apostle, to those who knew him well; *Ye know after what manner I have been with you at all seasons—how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.—I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.*† On the other hand, how powerful an encouragement, how precious a recompense, was imparted to those who laboured, and watched, *as they that must give account,*‡ by the faithful adherence, the filial respect and affection of those, whom they

\* 2 Cor. xii. 15. † Acts xx. 18, 20, 26. ‡ Heb. xiii. 7.

considered to be their children in the Lord :\* and not only by respect and affection towards themselves ; but by that exemplary holiness and consistency, which proved to their spiritual fathers that they had not laboured in vain. The Christian sincerity and uprightness of these converts were St. Paul's *hope, and joy, and crown of rejoicing.*† *I have no greater joy, says St. John, than to hear that my children walk in the truth.*‡

How beautiful and holy, in all its perfectness of obligation, is the spiritual connexion which subsists between a faithful minister of Christ, and the flock which he is appointed to feed with the pure word of God. How many are the methods, by which that bond of affection may be more closely drawn. How various are the ways, in which a faithful and vigilant pastor may apply himself to the consciences of men, and promote their spiritual welfare ; administering instruction, reproof, consolation ; becoming *all things to all men, that by all means he may save some :*§ always on the watch for opportunities of seasonably interposing the great truths and warnings of the Gospel ; anxiously alive to

\* 1 Cor. iv. 15. Philem. 10

† 3 John 4.

† 1 Thess. ii. 19.

§ 1 Cor. ix. 22.

the symptoms of religious improvement in his flock, and looking to that, as his strong encouragement and rich reward. Many an anxious care does he experience, for the welfare of those, who are endeared to him by the sacred sympathies of spiritual affinity; many a sorrow for failures, in which the world thinks he has no interest; many a joy also for blessings, which he alone perceives descending upon the heads of those whom he loves in the Lord. And such a shepherd is not without his recompense even in this world; *The sheep hear his voice, and he calleth his own sheep by name, and he leadeth them out, and goeth before them; and the sheep follow him; for they know his voice.\**

Such, my brethren, were the Apostles; such were the first pastors and teachers of the Church of Christ; such have been many holy fathers of that Church, who imbibed the true spirit of that Gospel which it is intended to uphold and propagate: and in proportion as all its ministers, by the aid of that Spirit, who is promised to them an abiding and a sanctifying Spirit, can assimilate themselves to that perfect model of self-devotion and disinterestedness; of ardent zeal for the salvation of mankind; and of singleness of

\* John x. 4.

intention as preachers of the Gospel only; in that proportion will they be burning and shining lights, to illuminate and to purify the world; and in that proportion will the kingdom of Christ on earth be set forward, and his great designs of mercy carried on towards their accomplishment.

But let our hearers bear in mind that the work is not all ours, nor theirs; but the work of the Spirit: *the preparation of the heart is from the Lord.\* Paul may plant and Apollos water; but God giveth the increase.†* Yet, as he gives the increase to the husbandman, by blessing his labours; so, in the cultivation of the good seed of his Word, his blessings follow the honest and sincere exertions of those who sow, and of those, in whose hearts the soil has been prepared for its reception. An earnest striving for the promised aid of the Spirit there must be in both: and if the Churches be not so firmly *established in the faith*, nor so rapidly increased, as they ought to be, the fault may be, and doubtless often is, not only, nor principally, in the preachers of the Word; but in those hearers, who do not labour to make a conscientious application, and practical improvement of what they hear.

It is very refreshing to the pious spirit, to

\* Prov. xxi. 1.

† 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.

turn away for a season from the formalities, and schisms, and errors, which too often encumber and injure the visible Church of Christ, to the spiritual piety, the undivided unity, the perfect charity, the ardent zeal, the fervent and constant devotion of the apostolical age. The picture which I have now presented to you, my Christian friends, by collecting into one point of view some of the most striking touches of the Sacred History, will not be without its use, if, while it gives to some of you a more vivid and pleasing idea of the primitive Church of Christ, it shall lead you, by the blessing of God, to realize in your own persons some of its most attractive and praiseworthy features, and to prove yourselves *fellow-citizens with the saints\** and martyrs of old, and genuine lively members of the spotless and unblemished household of God.†

*And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance amongst all them which are sanctified.‡*

\* Eph. ii. 19.

† Eph. v. 27.

‡ Acts xx. 32.



A  
SECOND COURSE OF LECTURES  
ON THE  
ACTS OF THE APOSTLES,  
PREACHED IN THE  
PARISH CHURCH OF ST. BOTOLPH, BISHOPSGATE,  
IN LENT, 1828.





LECTURES  
ON  
THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

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LECTURE VII.

EPHES. iii. 8.

*Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.*

**I**N my last course of Lent Lectures upon the Acts of the Apostles, I considered the principal transactions of those holy men for the space of about eleven years, from the ascension of Jesus Christ, to the persecution begun by Herod; at the same time giving a general sketch of the formation and constitution of the primitive Church of Christ; the model and pattern, by which, as far as circumstances will permit, all the branches of his universal Church ought to be framed and

governed. The remaining portion of the history, which is almost entirely confined to the personal ministry of St. Paul, will form the subject of my present course; although I shall not preclude myself from reverting to such topics, as were incidentally handled before, by way of connecting one set of observations with the other, and of enlarging and retouching the portrait, already drawn, of the Church in its infant state.

I will commence with an observation upon the credibility of the sacred historian, whose narrative is under our consideration. St. Luke relates, in the Acts of the Apostles, a series of transactions, which happened in his own time: and, therefore, when he wrote, a great number of persons must have been living, who were able at once to confirm, or to deny, the truth of his relations. He is very particular in mentioning the names of places, where the various incidents which he records, occurred, and of the persons concerned in them. Many of those very persons were alive, when his history was written, and could be immediately appealed to for testimony. Some of them were men of high rank and station, who had constantly about them many witnesses of their proceedings; and of the occurrences themselves, some were of so striking and remarkable

a nature, that they must have been, if they ever happened at all, matters of public notoriety. The conversion of Saul, and of the chamberlain of Candace; the supernatural release of Peter from prison, in consequence of which Herod commanded the keepers to be put to death; the infliction of blindness upon the sorcerer Elymas, in the presence of Sergius Paulus, the Roman governor of Cyprus; the divine honours offered to Paul and Barnabas at Lystra; the pleading of Paul before Festus and Agrippa; all these were incidents, which must have been the topics of common conversation in the parts where they occurred; and if they had never occurred at all, it would have been madness in the historian, to furnish his readers with such abundant and ready means of detecting his imposture. He would in that case have dealt more in generals. For instance, in relating the miracle at Cyprus,\* he would have said, that it happened in the presence of a certain great man of the province; but when he mentioned, not only that it was the Roman deputy, but his very name, Sergius Paulus, he furnished an easy test of his own veracity; because it could very readily be ascertained, whether there had been any such deputy as Sergius Paulus; and

\* Acts xiii. 6.

it is probable that either he, or some of his family, was living, when St. Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles. So when he relates that Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue at Corinth, *believed on the Lord with his whole house*,\* he gave the Jews a ready means of detecting the incorrectness of his narrative, if it were untrue. And all these particulars are introduced into the history in so natural and unstudied a manner, as to convey an impression to the reader's mind, that the author set down nothing but what he himself believed to be true. It may be added, that he wrote for the more immediate information of a man of rank, who was less likely to be imposed upon by forged accounts, and would have readier means of inquiry, than were possessed by humble and illiterate persons.

Another mark of veracity in the sacred historian is this, that he does not deliver an elaborate and minute account of all the transactions of the Apostles for the first eleven years of their ministry; but confines himself to a few of the most remarkable facts, which he had learned from those who were eye witnesses; giving a slight and summary sketch, rather than an exact and complete history of the Church, down to the

\* Acts xviii. 8.

time when he himself was engaged in the work of spreading the Gospel, by being chosen as a companion to St. Paul. But from the moment, when he thus became himself a witness of the facts which he records, his narrative becomes very circumstantial and detailed.

His great object appears to have been, to give his noble convert Theophilus a full account of St. Paul; of his mission to the Gentiles (of whom Theophilus was probably one), and of the success which attended his ministry. Accordingly, the incidents, which he selects for his narrative from the earlier proceedings of the Apostles, are principally those, which have some reference to the admission of the heathens into the Church of Christ. The gift of tongues, the preaching of the Gospel to the Samaritans, the conversion of the Ethiopian, of Cornelius, and of the Grecians at Antioch, are all of this description: and these, together with the ministry and martyrdom of Stephen, which are perhaps introduced on account of the share which St. Paul had in his death, are the chief particulars contained in the first twelve chapters of the Acts.

St. Paul himself was the most remarkable of the Apostles, both as to the circumstances and end of his call to the ministry; and was

probably an object of greater curiosity than any of his brethren, both to the Jewish and the Gentile converts, but certainly to the latter. His appeal to Cæsar, his residence and preaching at Rome for the space of more than two years together, and the conversion of some of the imperial household,\* had no doubt excited a lively interest concerning him in the Church at large : and to those who had been admitted into the Gospel covenant by his ministry, or under his authority, without that obedience to the law of Moses, which many even of the Christian teachers held to be indispensable, it was of great importance, that the vocation and commission of St. Paul should be established by satisfactory evidence. These considerations will account for the manner, in which the narrative of St. Luke glides off from the general history of the Apostles into the personal transactions of St. Paul : and this also is an additional symptom of veracity in the sacred historian.

In the eleventh chapter it is related, that *they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And*

\* Phil. i. 13. iv. 22.

*some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.*

In some of the most popular commentaries on the Bible, the *Grecians* are said to mean Jews, who spoke the Greek language. But it is almost certain, from the context, that we are to understand Gentiles: and this is the first instance in which the Gospel was publicly spoken of, though not preached by an Apostle, to the heathen. Let us here remark, how the providence of God can turn the afflictions of his Church to its advancement. The very persecution, which was designed to check the progress of the Gospel, and to crush it in its infancy, was the means of its earlier propagation to distant parts. If the Christians had not been vexed and evil intreated at Jerusalem, the heathens at Antioch had not so soon heard of the Lord Jesus. Many other instances might be adduced from the history of the Church, to illustrate the continued fulfilment of that prophecy, which described the impotency of human malice and cunning, when opposed to the eternal purposes of God in the plan of man's redemption; *Why do*



*the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth, against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined to be done.\**

In the thirteenth chapter it is related, that while certain prophets and teachers in the Church at Antioch were ministering unto the Lord, *the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul, for the work whereunto I have called them:* that is, for the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles. *And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.* With reference, first to his miraculous conversion, and secondly to this special ordination, St. Paul speaks of himself as *a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God.†*

From this incident it appears, that a public and formal calling to the office of preaching the Gospel was necessary, even to those who had the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost; necessary

\* Ps. ii. 1. Acts iv. 25.

† Rom. i. 1.

that is, not on account of any intrinsic virtue in the outward form, but rendered so by the declared will of God. Our Saviour sent his disciples, as his Father had sent him; and he sent them with an outward and visible act of commission. *He breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.\** “And though Saul and Barnabas were effectually called by the Holy Spirit to the Apostleship of the Gentiles, they did not enter upon the discharge of their function, till, under the direction of the same Spirit, they had been separated to the work of the ministry, by prayer, and the imposition of hands.”† In like manner the great Apostle’s favourite scholar Timothy, who had been designated by prophecy as a sacred person‡, was formally admitted into the ministry by the laying on of the Apostle’s hands.§ We hold therefore, and, as we conceive, on the authority of Scripture, that as *no man taketh this honour to himself, but he that is called of God,*|| so even he, who has reason to think that he *is* called of God in the ordinary course of his providence, must submit his pretensions to

\* John xx. 22.

† Bishop Burnet, Pref. to his Vindication of the Ordinations of the Church of England.

‡ 1 Tim. iv. 14.

§ 2 Tim. i. 6.

|| Heb. v. 4.

those whom the Church has appointed to *try the spirits*; and must be content to receive from them a commission for the regular exercise of his ministry. This, I say, we maintain upon the authority of Scripture; and, were it otherwise, we should still maintain it on the ground of expediency, as being necessary for the good order and uniformity of the visible Church. This is the doctrine asserted in the twenty-third Article of our own Church. "It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the Sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called and sent to execute the same. And those we judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men, who have public authority given unto them in the congregation to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard." With respect to the description of persons to whom that authority is to be given, although in the present instance the prophets and teachers of the Church at Antioch were not superior in office, or order, to Saul and Barnabas whom they ordained, we think we have the clearest historical evidence of its having been exercised by bishops during the first ages of the Church, after their appointment by the Apostles; and we think also, to say the least

of it, that there are advantages in that mode of ordination which are possessed by no other.

In the account which is given, in the same chapter, of the success which attended the preaching of Paul and Barnabas in the dissolute island of Cyprus, there is one peculiarity deserving of remark. At the very commencement of his ministry amongst the Gentiles, Paul was opposed by the pretended sorcerer Bar-jesus;\* as he himself, in the days of his ignorance, had opposed the preachers of Gospel truth. But *he* had acted in obedience to the impulses of an erring conscience; and *verily thought with himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*:† whereas the false prophet of Paphos was addressed by the indignant Apostle, as one who was *full of all subtlety and all mischief, a child of the devil, an enemy of all righteousness, perverting the ways of the Lord*; that is, in all probability, misrepresenting both the doctrines preached by the Apostles, and the miracles performed in attestation of them; ascribing them, as the Scribes and Pharisees had ascribed our Saviour's wonderful works, to the agency of evil spirits; and so incurring the dreadful and unpardonable sin of

\* Acts xiii. 6.

† Acts xxvi. 9.

blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. But the peculiarity to which I alluded is this: St. Paul was prompted by the Holy Spirit to mark, in a conspicuous and undeniable manner, the certainty of his own credentials, and the sinfulness of his opponent. The mode of doing this being probably left to his own choice, the punishment, by which his own incredulity had been reprov'd, would naturally suggest itself to his mind; and accordingly he declared to the sorcerer, *Behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee; and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about, seeking some to lead him by the hand.*

Upon the arrival of Paul and his companion at Antioch, (not the Antioch in Syria, from which they had been sent forth, but another city of the same name in Pisidia,) they made, in the synagogue of the Jews, a solemn declaration of the great and vital doctrine of the Gospel, that *through Jesus Christ was preached unto them the forgiveness of sins; and that by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.\** This declaration was first made to the Jews; but

\* Acts xiii. 38.

attracted the notice of the Gentiles, who besought, that the same words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. The interval was however spent, by Paul and Barnabas, in conversation with the pious Jews and proselytes: but on the next Sabbath day, *when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; partly at the popularity of the new teachers, but more especially on account of the great concourse of Gentiles, who presented themselves as candidates for those privileges, which the Jews considered to belong exclusively to themselves: and they spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.* Upon this, Paul and Barnabas made open proclamation, in the face of Jews and Gentiles, of their mission to the heathen. *It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you, (Jews); but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.* Here then, properly speaking, was opened by an Apostle the divine commission of evangelizing the heathen world. The Gospel, which had been preached, in pursuance of their Lord's command, *in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria\**, was now to be carried to the

\* Acts i. 8.

*uttermost part of the earth.* And what was the conduct of the Gentiles when that joyful news was sounded in their ears? *When they heard it, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained to eternal life, (or, as the words properly signify, as many as were set in order for eternal life, that is, were duly prepared for the reception of the Gospel,) believed.*

The Jewish and Gentile citizens of Antioch, viewed with reference to the reception which they gave to the Gospel, are the types of two classes of hearers, upon whom the Word preached produces very different effects: this history is but one out of many instances to prove, that men who enjoy every external advantage of religion, are oftentimes far more insensible to its spirit, more inaccessible to the energy of divine truth, than those who are suddenly called out of entire darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel. To have in trust the oracles of God; to be ritually admitted into covenant with him; to bear his name; to be called his people; to have a speculative knowledge of his will; to be in communion with the saints; these are great advantages, singular privileges; special vouchsafements of God's mercy! but they are only the outward part of religion, instrumental and

auxiliary to its spirit and essence; the steps and approaches, by which we are to ascend to the shrine of truth and the throne of grace. Yet how common has it been, in every age of the Church of God, for men to rest contented with these; to regard them as the substance of religion, and as constituting the service which God will be contented to receive, and to which he will assign his covenanted rewards. Important as the outward forms and offices of religion must ever be, to beings of a mixed and imperfect nature; yet if their proper end and use be not steadfastly kept in view, they will impede those spiritual results, which they are intended to produce. The reading of God's Word is a religious duty: but if it be performed merely as being *in itself* a duty, and without the further and higher view of realizing both its precepts and promises in our own persons, it is made the groundwork of a mistaken and dangerous self-complacency: we fancy that we are building up a goodly superstructure, while in fact we are busied about the scaffolding; and that, which is the true food of the immortal soul, from which, in the process of a spiritual reading and digesting, it should draw that nutriment which feeds the life blood of the inner man, serves only to



fill it with crude and speculative notions ; inflates it with vain glory, and confirms it in limited and inadequate views of religion. Such was the case with the Jews, who, as St. Paul said on another occasion, *rested in the law, and made their boast of God, and knew his will, and approved the things that were more excellent (or tried the differences of things) being instructed out of the law;*\* and yet how far they were from profiting by that precious and highly valued treasure, appears from the history of our Saviour's ministry, and from the reception which they gave to his Gospel, shadowed out and prefigured as it was in their Scriptures. By a process analogous to this, the positive ordinances of religion are often by degrees substituted for its moral energies or effects ; and thus the very *armour of righteousness* becomes an incumbrance, instead of an instrument of protection or of conquest.

On the other hand, it sometimes happens, that when the word of God is for the first time heard by an ignorant sinner, and the glorious disclosures of the Gospel are made to one, who had before held no intercourse with religion, its effect is increased by the marvellous contrast between

\* Rom. ii. 17.

a total darkness and the sudden blaze of light: the soul is taken, as it were, by surprise; its spiritual desires are at once awakened, and satisfied with the assurances of God's pardoning mercy: *it is glad, and glorifies the word of the Lord.\**

But in thus contrasting the blindness and incredulity of the Jewish formalist, with the ready docility of the soul-humbled and awakened Gentile, who pressed eagerly forward into the kingdom of heaven, we must not do injustice to the ancient people of God. As a nation, the Jews rejected their Messiah. He was rejected by their rulers, their priesthood, the authorized interpreters of their law, and the chiefs of their religious sects. But then it must not be forgotten, that his Apostles were Jews; that after his resurrection he appeared to more than five hundred Jewish brethren at once; that three thousand Jews were added to the disciples on the day of Pentecost; that not long after, five thousand were converted by Peter and John; that multitudes, both of men and women, were again added to the Lord after the death of Ananias and Sapphira; and that, by the confession, or complaint, of the high priest himself, the Apostles *had filled*

\* Acts xiii. 48.

*Jerusalem with their doctrine,\** insomuch that he and his fellows began to feel some alarm, lest the indignation of the people should be excited against them as the murderers of Jesus. *Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us.* Shortly afterwards we read, that *the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.†* So even in this city of Antioch, where *the chief men of the city* persecuted Paul and Barnabas, many of the Jews followed them; and in Iconium, *a great multitude of the Jews, and also of the Greeks, believed.‡* Let us, then, in the first place, learn to regard the Jewish people, of whose unbelief and hardness of heart we are perhaps accustomed to speak in too indiscriminate terms of censure, as our elder brethren in Christ: and, in the second place, let us observe, that although the Jewish nation is, by a just decree of the Almighty, degraded from its place and station in the world, so to remain, a perpetual monument of his justice and truth, *till the fulness of the Gentiles be come in,§* yet the individuals of that nation are not judicially excluded from the blessings of the gospel

\* Acts v. 28.

† Acts vi. 7.

‡ Acts xiv. 1.

§ Rom. xi. 25.

covenant, although the very fact of their preservation as a distinct race, which ought to open their eyes to the evangelical fulfilment of prophecy, serves only to perpetuate their blindness: *but they also, if they abide not in unbelief, shall be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again.*

But, lastly, let us take warning from their fate; and not suffer a devoted attachment to, or a complacent acquiescence in the externals of religion, to usurp the place of spiritual piety and holiness. *Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy; otherwise if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.\**

It appears, from the conclusion of the fourteenth chapter, that the mission, upon which Paul and Barnabas had been sent from Antioch, was a special mission, confined to certain objects, and to the inhabitants of a certain district. *When they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia, and thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God, for the work which they fulfilled.*

\* Rom. xi. 11. 21.

That work, it appears, was, to open, in a public and solemn manner, the door of the kingdom to the Gentiles; and to justify its opening, even upon the principles of the Jews themselves: *when they were come, and had gathered all the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.*

That great mystery of the Gospel having been thus proclaimed, they left the knowledge of it to be spread abroad by the ordinary means of communication; till the curiosity of the heathen world should be sufficiently awakened, and the more religious Gentiles prepared to receive the doctrine of the Apostles, when they should enter, at the proper time, into a larger and more arduous field of ministerial labours. The interval was employed by St. Paul and his colleague in strengthening and consolidating the foundations of Christ's Church, which had been already laid; an object of the first importance, and nearest to the heart of that great Apostle, zealous as he was for the conversion of the heathen. *They abode there long time with the disciples,\* and continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.†*

\* Acts xiv. 28.

† Acts xv. 35.

It is not enough that we bring men to the knowledge of Christ, unless they are afterwards, by the usual process of instruction, rooted, and grounded, and built up in it. They are not made Christians once and for ever; but must grow in spiritual strength and grace, from the infancy of the life of God in the soul, to *a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness in Christ*;\* being fed by their appointed teachers, first with the milk of the word, and, by degrees, with stronger meat, from *the principles of the doctrine of Christ, going on unto perfection*.† Happy are they, who possess the advantage of such continued and improving intercourse with those faithful labourers in the harvest of souls, who not only sow the good seed, but watch and tend it in its anxious progress to maturity; and happy those spiritual husbandmen, who are permitted to behold the fields which they have sown, whitening for the harvest; and many souls, which they have trained up, under the continual dew of the Spirit, to be plants of righteousness, ready to be gathered, together with themselves, into the garners of the Lord!

\* Eph. iv. 13.

† Heb. vi. 1.

## LECTURE VIII.

—◆—  
ACTS xv. 8, 9,

*God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us: and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.*

ST. PETER is here speaking of the Gentiles, of whom the first-fruits had been gathered into the Church by himself, when he was sent into that harvest by a special revelation of the counsel of God. Upon that occasion he had made the joyful and consolatory declaration; *Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.\** This was to the Apostles themselves a great mystery; as it was to the Jews in general a great objection against the Gospel. That the Gentiles, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, excluded, as they

\* Acts x. 34.

supposed, from the promised inheritance, as well of the spiritual as of the earthly Canaan, were indeed to be naturalized in the kingdom of the Messiah, and to partake in all its privileges and expectations, was a truth, for the reception of which our Saviour had endeavoured in vain to prepare his countrymen by many hints and similitudes, intelligible enough to those, whose minds were not preoccupied by inveterate opinions. We cannot, however, be greatly surprised at the reluctance, with which even the disciples of Jesus Christ were brought to admit this novel and unexpected doctrine; for although many intimations had been given by the prophets, that the heathen were to be enrolled in the number of Messiah's soldiers and servants; the Jews had been accustomed to understand those intimations, as pointing rather to a comprehension of subjugation and servitude, than to a fellowship of immunities and rewards. Certain it is, that this feature of the Gospel dispensation was not revealed to them with such a degree of clearness, as to leave them without excuse for not discerning and receiving it; for St. Paul expressly declares, that it was *the mystery, which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and*



*prophets, by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body; and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel.\**

There had been, in a certain sense, a manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, when the wise men came from the east, to do homage to the new-born king of the Jews; but it seems hardly reasonable to suppose, that they were acquainted with the real nature of the Messiah's office and kingdom; and that they received him themselves, or proclaimed him to their countrymen, as the Saviour of the world. Yet still their heaven-directed journey to the abode of the infant Jesus was an indication, that he was born a king not for the Jews only; and served, perhaps, to diffuse through the east a strong, though indistinct expectation, that some great change was to be effected by this wonderful person.

But undoubtedly there was no revelation made to the Gentiles of Christ the Mediator, the Reconciler, the Redeemer, until his Apostles, by the special direction and impulse of the Spirit, proclaimed that new and glorious, but to the Jews unpalatable truth; that *God is no respecter of persons*, as laying claim to his favourable regard in the new dispensation of grace upon

\* Eph. iii. 5.

any other ground than that of their faith and godliness; but that *in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him.*

If God be no respecter of persons, then his Gospel mercies were designed from the first for all mankind; not for the Jews alone, before the coming of Christ; nor, since his coming, for a few, irrespectively and arbitrarily chosen. If it be said, that the Gospel was originally intended for, and promised to the Jews; and that it was communicated to the Gentiles, only when *they* had rejected it; we answer, True; it was undoubtedly designed in the first instance for the Jews; the promise was to Abraham and his seed: but it was to be given to them only primarily, not exclusively. Theirs was the right of primogeniture; but not that right, which excludes the younger brethren from all succession to the inheritance. They had the privilege of precedence in entering into the kingdom of heaven. From them, as from a centre, the circles of divine mercy were to spread, with a wider and a wider compass, to every nation, and kindred; till all mankind should become, what the Jews once were, a people in covenant with the Lord. I have already remarked, that although the Jewish nation

rejected the counsel of God, and proved themselves unworthy of the honour for which they had been designed; although the Lord of life *came to his own, and his own received him not* ;\* yet still the Gospel was first delivered to Jews, and first embraced by Jews; and by the ministry of Jews was it communicated to the world at large.

This mystery of the Gospel dispensation, which has always been a stumbling-block of offence to the Jews, is to Christians a striking evidence of the truth of their religion. If the prophets foretold the appearance of a great person, who was to effect the overthrow of idolatry, and bring all mankind to the knowledge and worship of the true God; and if the religion of Jesus Christ did effect this in a very wonderful degree, within a short time after its first promulgation, and continues to effect progressively the same glorious change; it is plain, that the conversion of the Gentiles is one proof, that Christianity is a religion from God.

Born in a Christian land, initiated in our infancy into the Gospel covenant, accustomed to the daily enjoyment of its privileges and means of grace, we are apt to overlook some of those

\* John i. 11.

features, which at its first establishment afforded to the pious believer topics of thankfulness to God. For instance, its comprehensiveness, which was a cause of offence to the unbelieving Jew, ought to be a distinct ground of rejoicing and gratitude to the believing Gentile, and to those, who like ourselves, are sprung from Gentile tribes. The supreme Ruler of the world might have confined the spiritual blessings of the Gospel, as he did the temporal advantages of the Law, to one peculiar people. All mankind had *sinned and come short of the glory of God*;\* none deserved redemption: there would therefore have been no injustice, had he decreed to confine the covenant of grace to his ancient and chosen people. As all boasting was shut out by the universal corruption of sin; all expostulation and complaint would also have been shut out, had sentence of perpetual exclusion been passed against those, who were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. Undoubtedly the Creator had full right to say of his creatures, *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion*.† It may be said, that such a limitation of his mercy would have been inconsistent with

\* Rom. iii. 23.

† Rom. ix. 15. Exod. xxxiii. 19.

his justice. We may now indeed conclude that it is so, because such limitation has not been made: but no man could have pretended to say beforehand, that he was of right entitled to redemption; and therefore no man could justly have complained, if it had not been extended to him in all the fulness of its accomplishment by Jesus Christ. Surely then we, and all believers, from the first development of that mystery of the Gospel to its final consummation, ought to be exceedingly thankful, that the Almighty did not so limit and circumscribe his plan of mercy; that he did admit the Gentiles into the Messiah's kingdom; that he did pledge himself by his Holy Spirit to a larger and more comprehensive scheme of redemption; and did execute it by his only-begotten Son, who died for the sins of the world. *Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou so visitest him?\** When Jew and Gentile were alike *concluded under sin*,† how graciously didst thou vouchsafe to unclothe alike the gates of mercy to them both; *to give light to them that sat in darkness and the shadow of death*,‡ and to *lift up an ensign to the nations from far*,§ even the ensign of the cross!

\* Ps. viii. 4. † Gal. iii. 22. ‡ Luke i. 79. § Is. v. 26.

Let us be thankful also, for indeed it is a subject of inexpressible thankfulness, that *we* are not amongst those heathen tribes, who have not even yet received the glad tidings of salvation. Let us bless God, that his providence has so ordered the course of human affairs, that the tide of civilization, at an early period after the rising of the day-spring from on high, set towards the shores of these countries, and prepared a barbarous people for the reception of the Gospel. Let us be thankful that its light, although at times obscured and oppressed, has never been extinct amongst us; and that since it was purified and renewed at the glorious Reformation, we have not only enjoyed its illuminating and sanctifying influence ourselves, but have been permitted to follow the steps of the holy Apostles in diffusing it to the remotest corners of the earth. It is a work of charity peculiarly suited to us, whom the Lord *hath called out of darkness into his marvellous light*,\* to repeat and enforce the call to those who are still in the shadow of death: *Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.*† Let us pray that the call may be more earnestly and emphatically made; more readily and effectually listened to.

\* 1 Pet. ii. 9.

† Ephes. v. 14.

But it is time for us to return to the proceedings of the Apostles. It was now fully revealed to them, that *God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.*\* But upon this arose a very natural question: *How* are the Gentiles to be admitted into the kingdom of God? Is the tabernacle of Moses to become the vestibule and entrance to the Church of Christ? Are the Gentiles to be made denizens in the commonwealth of Israel, before they can become *fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God?*† Is the distinguishing federal rite of the old Covenant to be the indispensable method of transition, from their natural state of total alienation, to one of complete reconciliation with God? It was very natural for the Jewish converts to think that it should be so; especially when they recollected, without fully understanding, our Saviour's declaration, that he was come, *not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.*‡ If not to destroy the law, said they, then surely not to abrogate circumcision, the characteristic rite of the law: forgetting that circumcision was only *a seal of the righteousness of faith*;§ of which God had now given a surer pledge and security in

\* Acts xiv. 27.

† Ephes. ii. 19.

‡ Matth. v. 17.

§ Rom. iv. 11.

the death of Jesus Christ; *in whom neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.\** The Jews attributed a greater virtue to circumcision than that with which it was invested by the ordinance of God. It was inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel dispensation, to attribute any virtue, any intrinsic *justifying* or *saving* virtue, to any ordinance or outward act whatever; and, therefore, this opinion of the efficacious virtue of circumcision, erroneous as it was under the Mosaic dispensation, was far more injuriously so under the Christian. *By the deeds of the law, circumcision amongst the rest, shall no flesh be justified in his sight.†* If circumcision were necessary to a Christian convert, it was so, as having a justifying efficacy; not simply as an initiatory rite; for the appointed form of admission into the family of Christ was baptism; but the sacrifice of the death of Christ was therefore necessary, because no legal observance had, or could have, any justifying efficacy.

The false opinion, then, which the Jewish believers, especially they of the Pharisees, entertained, respecting the necessity of circumcision, was an error which affected the first and most

\* Gal. v. 6.

† Rom. i. 20.



important principles of Christian faith. Yet it was not a question, respecting which the Holy Spirit had, in the first instance, fully enlightened the minds of all the Apostles and first preachers of the Gospel; for we read in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts, that when *certain men which came down from Judea, taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved; it occasioned no small dissension and disputation with them; and in order to the allaying of it, they determined to send Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, to Jerusalem, to the Apostles and elders.* Upon their arrival there, a council was holden of the Apostles and elders, for the purpose of considering this matter; and the circumstance recorded by St. Luke, that *there was much disputing in that assembly, which was not appeased till Peter and Paul and Barnabas and James had addressed the council, proves that the Holy Ghost had not authoritatively predetermined this question; but had left it to the determination of their own wisdom and piety.* But perhaps it may be said, that this position is hardly to be reconciled with the expression employed in the letter which was the fruit of their deliberations, *It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us.*

And I must confess that the ordinary interpretation of that passage is this,—“It seemed good unto us, being divinely instructed by the Holy Ghost.” Now I need hardly say, that I admit, in the fullest manner, that the Apostles were enlightened by the Holy Ghost; that they were at all times so far under his control, as to be secured by him from any error which could affect the integrity of the Gospel; and that they were especially informed and constrained where it was necessary. But I consider, that the necessity of circumcision to a Gentile convert was a question, which, having been once enlightened as to the free admission of the Gentiles into the Gospel covenant, they were competent to determine by the exercise of their own judgment, without the special interference of the Spirit. Upon this principle the Council of Jerusalem was assembled for the purpose of deliberating upon this question. Upon this principle St. Peter argued, that as he had been specially instructed to admit Cornelius into the Church of Christ, but had received no directions as to circumcision, it was reasonable to conclude, that God did not require the performance of that rite in the case of Gentile converts, having, without it, *given them the Holy Ghost, even*, says the Apostle, *as he did unto us*;

*and put no difference between us, purifying their hearts by faith.\** After which, Barnabas and Paul declared what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them; no mention being made of circumcision; and at last, James, the first bishop of Jerusalem, to whom respect and deference appear to have been paid, perhaps because he was the kinsman of our Lord, terminated the discussion by a proposition full of wisdom and moderation, that the Gentile believers should be required to comply with the Mosaic law, only to the same degree in which the proselytes had always been required to observe it, by abstaining from every practice which savoured of idolatry and idolatrous customs. But all this was the result of discussion and deliberation; a result sanctioned undoubtedly by the Spirit of truth, who had given visible demonstration that these holy men were under his guidance and control; but it was not a conclusion specially dictated by the Spirit.

It appears, therefore, that the expression, *it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us*, is to be understood in the following sense: It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, that circumcision should not be required of Gentile Christians; and this

\* Acts xv. 8, 9.

we know, because he descended upon Cornelius and his household; and *they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.\** But Paul and Barnabas also, who were separated for the work of delivering the word of reconciliation to the Gentiles, have admitted great numbers into the Church, without requiring them to be circumcised; this is another token that no such requisition has been dictated by the Spirit. It is plain, then, what the mind of the Spirit is, in this particular; and such, of necessity, must ours be: and thus, it seemed good to the Holy Ghost before, and it seems good to us now, *to lay upon you no greater burthen than these necessary things; that is, no greater burthen of ceremonial compliance with the law of Moses than these things, which are necessary to mark your detestation of pagan superstition, and your entire separation from the worship and service of false gods; namely, that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication, which in the Jewish Scriptures is synonymous with idolatrous inclinations and practices; from which*

\* Acts x. 45.

*if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.*

How necessary these inhibitions were, in the case of the Gentile converts, appears from the instance of the Corinthian Christians, who are cautioned by St. Paul not to be at the same time *partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.\**

In the conclusion of the fifteenth chapter it is related, that when Paul and Barnabas were about to revisit the cities where they had preached the word of the Lord, Barnabas, whose name, "the Son of Consolation," which the Apostles had given him,† seems to indicate that he was of a kind and generous disposition, wished to take with them his kinsman John, surnamed Mark. But as he had departed from them on their former mission, from Pamphylia, through hesitation or timidity, *Paul thought not good to take him with them*; the work which they had undertaken, being one which required great firmness and resolution on the part of those who were engaged in it; for *no man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God;‡* assuredly not fit for the ministry of that kingdom, which at all times

\* 1 Cor. x. 21.

† Acts iv. 36.

‡ Luke ix. 62.

requires, but then most especially required, from those who undertook it, an uncompromising and unhesitating devotion of themselves, their energies, their inclinations, their designs, to the single object of saving souls.

The contention between Paul and Barnabas *was so sharp, that they departed asunder one from the other; and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, (or Silvanus,) and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.\**

No doubt this contention was matter of affliction to all parties concerned; to Mark also of improvement. He was made to see the dangerous nature of his fault, by the opinion which the great Apostle entertained of it; and was led to seek for a larger measure of spiritual strength and boldness. That he was afterwards restored to the good opinion of St. Paul, may be inferred from the manner in which he is spoken of in his Epistles;† St. Peter also mentions him under the affectionate appellation of *Marcus, my son.*‡

As to Paul and Barnabas, their friendship had commenced under very peculiar circumstances. *When Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed*

\* Acts xvi. 39, 40. † Col. iv. 10. Philem. 24. 2 Tim. iv. 11.

‡ 1 Pet. v. 13.

*to join himself to the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the Apostles.\** They were associated together for a particular purpose, by the express direction of the Holy Ghost. As preachers of the Gospel, they had been persecuted, and they had triumphed together. It was not likely that a friendship so begun, and so cemented, should be seriously or permanently interrupted by a difference which related to a question of expediency. The inspired teacher who said, *Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath,*† could not long retain a feeling of resentment. He resisted, somewhat warmly, what he considered to be an ill-judged and injurious weakness on the part of Barnabas, who appears to have suffered the partiality of kindred to get the better of his judgment: but he continued to love him as his fellow-labourer in the sacred cause. In his first Epistle to the Corinthians, written a few years after this transaction, he speaks of Barnabas as again associated with him in the ministry; *or I only, and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?*‡

From this incident it appears, that the Holy

\* Acts ix. 26.

† Ephes. iv. 26.

‡ 1 Cor. ix. 6.

Spirit, while he fully informed the first preachers of the Gospel of all the truths which composed the perfect system of evangelical doctrine, and preserved them from error in all matters which concerned the integrity of the faith, and the purity of Christian worship, did not control their passions, nor exempt them from natural infirmity; but left them subject, like other men, to the *buffetings* of Satan and his messengers, *lest they should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of the revelations.*\* This distinction between intellectual gifts, even of the highest order, and the moral graces of Christianity, is to be carefully observed; in order that we may learn that the former are not necessarily and invariably productive of the latter. The richest treasures of speculative knowledge, and the most persuasive eloquence, are not incompatible with worldly-mindedness, or worse affections still, if they be not applied to the ends of a practical improvement in holiness; nay more, they may be very efficacious in bringing others to a knowledge of the truth, and yet not benefit their owner, unless he be fully aware of their intrinsic worthlessness, and *count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.*†

\* 2 Cor. xii. 7.

† Philip. iii. 8.



At the same time we may learn — and it is a consolatory reflection to those servants, and especially those *ministers* of Christ, who feel their own imperfections, and lament the hindrance which they may occasion to the cause of the Gospel — that some blemishes and weaknesses may be co-existent with very high degrees of spiritual excellence; that it must be the constant endeavour of those who labour under them, to master and subdue *the sin that doth most easily beset them* :\* but that while they manifest an ardent zeal for the glory of God, and the salvation of mankind, a singleness of holy purpose, a devotedness of heart; the pious and candid of mankind will overlook those imperfections, which they know must exist even in the best of men; or at least will gently admonish, and charitably excuse, and affectionately pray for them, and *beseech the Lord that this thing may depart from them*. † And indeed under all circumstances we greatly need the prayers of our brethren. Engaged as we are in a continued warfare with the enemies of man's salvation; victims marked out by their malice; objects of their affected scorn, but real fear; opposed as we are, faithfully and fearlessly opposed, to the prevailing opinions, and

\* Heb. x. 1.

† 2 Cor. xii. 8.

inclinations, and practices of a careless world; have we not abundant cause to desire, that like Paul and Silas, when they departed to the work of the ministry, we may be *recommended by you to the grace of God?*\*

\* Acts xv. 40.

## LECTURE IX.

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ACTS xvii. 11.

*These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*

WE now enter upon that division of the apostolic history, which is confined to the transactions of St. Paul and his attendants. Upon his separation from Barnabas he chose Silas for his companion, and shortly afterwards Timotheus.\* We may conclude also, that Luke himself, although he does not distinctly mention the fact, was either chosen, or permitted to attend the Apostle, if not before, yet certainly upon his coming to Troas; for in speaking of his voyage to Macedonia, which took place not long after the departure of Barnabas, the historian uses the first person; *Therefore losing from Troas, we*

\* Acts xv. 40. xvi. 3.

*came with a straight course to Samothracia.\** It may be proper in this place to mention, that St. Luke, according to the constant tradition of the early Church, was a native or inhabitant of Antioch: that he was an inhabitant of that city, when the Gospel was first preached there, may be inferred, with some degree of probability, from the minuteness with which several particulars concerning it are related in the eleventh chapter. We are told that *they, which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word.* But we are not informed of any of their proceedings in Phenice, or Cyprus; whereas a detailed account is given of all that was done at Antioch. The only reason which has been urged against the probability of this tradition is this, that his name is not a Syriac, but a Greek name; which is not strictly true; for it is, properly speaking, more of a Latin than a Greek name; and even if it were true, it would be no objection; for in the sixth chapter of the Acts we find Nicolas, an undoubted Greek name, mentioned as that of a proselyte of Antioch. It seems a probable supposition that Luke himself was a proselyte. It is also, I think, far from

\* Acts xvi. 11.

improbable, that Luke was the same person as the Lucius of Cyrene, who is mentioned in the first verse of the thirteenth chapter, as one of the prophets and teachers who were at Antioch, and of whom St. Paul speaks in the sixteenth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans; *Timotheus my work-fellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater my kinsmen, salute you*. The objections which have been made to this supposition cannot now be considered in detail. They are not such as, in my opinion, to destroy, or greatly to weaken, its probability. I will only remark upon the argument, which is grounded upon the difference of names, that in writing to the Christians at Rome, St. Paul would naturally use the Roman form of Lucius, in preference to that of Lucas.

But from this comparatively unimportant question let us return to the history itself. Timotheus, whom Paul selected for his confidential companion, was the son of a Jewess who had embraced the Christian faith; *but his father was a Greek*.\* His mother's name, Eunice, shews that she was of a family of Asiatic Jews, who spoke the Greek language. He *was well reported of*, says the historian, *by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium*. The topics

\* Acts xvi. 1.

of their commendation may be inferred, from the praise which St. Paul himself bestows upon him in the second Epistle\* addressed to this favourite disciple. In the first place his *unfeigned faith*; a faith unmixed with any worldly motive; not assumed, or professed, for the purpose of obtaining the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit; or of procuring to himself credit with men, as a distinguished teacher, and leader of a sect; but wholly without the leaven of hypocrisy.† For the purity and stedfastness of his faith he was indebted to the care, which had been taken by his mother, to instil religious principles into his youthful mind; for *the same faith*, St. Paul observes, *dwelt first in his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice*. If we inquire what the instruction was, which laid so sure a foundation for his Christian faith; we learn that it was instruction in the Scriptures of the Old Testament; for Timothy *from a child had known the Holy Scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation, through faith which was in Christ Jesus*. The Scriptures, both of the law and the prophets, had been so explained to him, as to convince him of their fulfilment in the person of Jesus Christ. Lois and Eunice, who

\* 2 Tim. i. 5.

† ἀνυπόκριτος.

had been converted to the true faith, had no doubt reasoned with Timothy, as our Lord had reasoned with the disciples on the way to Emmaus, and as St. Paul reasoned with the Thessalonians, *out of the Scriptures; opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead, and that Jesus whom he preached unto them, was Christ.\** It was St. Paul himself, however, who more perfectly instructed this youthful believer in the way of God, delivering to him *the form of sound words,†* and afterwards ordaining him to the ministry by the laying on of his hands, and qualifying him to receive the special gifts of the Holy Ghost.‡ He therefore addresses him as his *dearly beloved son, his own son in the faith.§*

This youthful, but well instructed and trustworthy Christian, St. Paul *would have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him, because of the Jews which were in those quarters; for they all knew that his father was a Greek.¶* This transaction at first sight appears to be inconsistent with the principle which had been laid down by the Apostolic council, that *circumcision was not to be required of the Gentiles: but it is*

\* Acts xvii. 2.                    † 2 Tim. i. 13.                    ‡ 2 Tim. i. 6.  
 § 2 Tim. 1. 2.    1 Tim. i. 2.                    ¶ Acts xvi. 3.

inconsistent only in appearance. The principle asserted by the Apostles was this, that circumcision was not to be required of any man, as necessary to salvation. They did not prohibit the use of circumcision to the Jewish Christians, provided that it was not regarded as a saving, or justifying ordinance. Timothy was not, properly speaking, a Gentile convert, for his mother was a Jewess, and he had been brought up either in the Jewish or the Christian religion: but he was not, like St. Paul, a *Hebrew of the Hebrews*, and would naturally be considered as following the parentage of his father, rather than of his mother. Now the very circumstance of St. Paul's being specially commissioned to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, rendered it particularly desirable, that he should give no unnecessary offence to the Jews. Although he was not to compromise the Gospel, by sanctioning those prejudices, which were derogatory to its spiritual efficacy, neither was he to indispose the minds of his countrymen for its reception, by a harsh and intolerant condemnation of those prejudices, where they did not interfere with Christian principles. Although St. Paul was a special ambassador of Christ to the Gentiles, yet he continued, even after he had solemnly opened his commission at Antioch in



Pisidia, to direct his first attention to the Jews, in every city which he visited; for *his heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel was, that they might be saved.*\* Now Timothy, being born of a Jewish mother, might be rendered still more completely a Jew, by undergoing the legal rite of circumcision, not as being necessary to salvation, but as a means of propitiating his countrymen; whereas *Titus, being a Greek, that is, a Gentile by birth, was not compelled to be circumcised,*† lest it should be thought necessary for every man to pass through the Jewish religion into the Christian. This conduct on the part of St. Paul, was a specimen of that happy application of the maxims of human prudence to the advancement of religion, which our Saviour appears to have recommended, when he directed his Apostles to be *wise as serpents, and harmless as doves;*‡ and it was an exemplification of the Apostle's own precept to his Corinthian converts, *Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God; even as I please all men in all things; not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.*§ The same account is to be given of the motives

\* Rom. x. 1.

† Gal. ii. 3.

‡ Matth. x. 16.

§ 1 Cor. x. 32.

which induced St. James and the elders to recommend, and St. Paul to consent to a compliance with the prejudices of the Jewish Christians at Jerusalem, by purifying himself with certain men who were under the obligation of a vow. As long as the temple and polity of the Jews continued to subsist, the long-suffering of God appeared to abstain from a solemn and open abrogation of his covenant with the descendants of Abraham; and so long were the Jewish members of the Christian Church, and especially those who dwelt in Palestine, permitted to observe the rites of the law, and the customs of the elders; for they were *all zealous of the law, and were informed that Paul taught all the Jews which were among the Gentiles, to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.\**

I wish now to call your attention to the conversion of Lydia, related in the fourteenth verse of the sixteenth chapter.

While the Apostle and his attendants were preaching at Philippi, in an oratory by the river side, *a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which*

\* Acts xxi. 20.

*worshipped God, heard them.* Which worshipped God; that is, the true God; the God of Moses. She was a Gentile by birth, but a proselyte to the worship of Jehovah. *Whose heart the Lord opened.* But how was her heart opened? Was it at once enlightened in the doctrines of the Gospel, and fixed in the steadfastness of a perfect faith? Was she suddenly and irresistibly converted by an overpowering constraint of the Spirit? No: her heart was opened so far, *that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.* She was disposed by the Holy Spirit to inquire after the things which belonged to her peace. She had served God to the best of her knowledge and ability, and so became, not indeed entitled to, but qualified for, a more effectual measure of light and grace. *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.\**

It is to be observed then, in the first place, that the understanding of Lydia, although she had aforetime worshipped the true God, did not enable her, by its natural light, clearly to discern the whole truth, or fully to comprehend the purport of the doctrines preached by Paul, until

\* John vii. 17.

it had been opened by the Lord; enlarged, and cleared from prejudice by the Spirit. Yet it must be observed, in the second place, that the effect of this spiritual interference was not to constrain her belief: it did not unseat reason from her tribunal, as a judge of truth; nor command her to give sentence at once, without any examination of the evidence proposed: but only prevented and assisted her in forming a right conclusion. The heart of Lydia was opened by the Lord, not to an instantaneous conviction and comprehension, but *to attend to the things which were spoken by Paul*. She considered, and examined what he said, with an inclination, no doubt, to believe it—for every honest and good heart must *wish* to find the Gospel true—yet at liberty to disbelieve it, if it had been obviously unreasonable and untrue. But as the Lord had begun a good work in her, so he carried it on to perfection. Seriousness and honesty of purpose obtained his awakening grace; a humble, teachable, inquiring spirit was guided by his enlightening grace in the use of its natural faculties; and the result was faith. The same process led to the same result in the case of the Berean Jews, whom the historian characterizes, with a remarkable emphasis of

commendation, as being *more noble than those in Thessalonica*, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so. And therefore, adds St. Luke, that is, because they were both ready to receive the word, and diligent and candid in their inquiries into its authority, *many of them believed*. This it is, to receive the word in an honest and good heart; this it is, to secure that indispensable guidance and instruction of the Spirit, without which no man can come unto Christ; which first predisposes him to long after a clearer insight into the things of God; then enables him to obtain such an insight; and lastly fixes and preserves him in just and satisfactory views of Gospel truths, and duties, and consolations.

You will remark, that when Lydia was baptized, it was not singly and alone; *She was baptized, and her household*. I pointed out, in a former lecture,\* the practical inference to be drawn by Christian fathers and heads of families, from the example of Cornelius, who *feared God with all his house*. So when Stephanas was baptized, his household was baptized with him.† And when the keeper of the prison at Philippi

\* Lect. V. p. 93.

† 1. Cor. i. 16.

inquired, *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* the answer was, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house:* and he *believed in God with all his house.\** One peculiarity of ancient society rendered it comparatively easy for the master of a house to ensure an outward conformity in religion on the part of his family. His servants were slaves. Yet we need not suppose that any compulsion was used, except that of the powerful influence of the Spirit speaking by the Apostles. The Gospel was preached not only to the head of the family, but to all the household, as at Philippi: they spake unto the keeper of the prison *the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.* But thus much at least we may collect, that these pious converts considered it to be a duty of charity, to afford to their slaves the same religious opportunities which they themselves enjoyed. And this, if any thing, is implied in the precept, *Masters, give unto your slaves that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.†*

When Paul and Silas were cast into prison at Philippi, we read that *at midnight they prayed, and sang praises unto God.‡* In all probability

\* Acts xvi. 30.

† Col. iv. 1.

‡ Acts xvi. 25.

they sang portions of the Psalms; not only praising God *that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name*;\* but praying to him for deliverance perhaps in the very words of the Psalmist; *Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee, according to the greatness of thy power: preserve thou those that are appointed to die.—Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name.*†

*And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.*

This awful interference of a divine power was not intended for the release of the imprisoned Apostle, as was the case when the angel opened the prison doors to Peter; † for Paul refused to go, until the magistrates besought him. It was therefore, we may suppose, designed partly for the confirmation and support of Paul and Silas, under this earnest of the *bonds and afflictions which awaited them in every city*;§ and partly for the conversion of the jailor and his household. If it be objected, that the conversion of a single

\* Acts v. 41.

† Ps. lxxix. 11. clxii. 7.

‡ Acts xii. 7.

§ Acts xx. 23.

family, and that not of high rank, was an object unworthy of so awful a display of supernatural power, we reply ; Of that it is impossible for us to judge. We are sure, that if the means were actually employed, the object, whatever it may have been, was worthy of them : and we are not to measure the importance of the object, in this instance, by the mere accession of a single family to the Christian cause. We know not in how great a degree the converted jailor may have been instrumental in bringing others to the knowledge of Christ. If he continued in his office, it is obvious that he would have more opportunities, than any other person in Philippi, of calling sinners to repentance.

But we must not pass over without remark the circumstances of his conversion. Alarmed at the overpowering attestation which had been given to the divine commission of his prisoners, *he came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas ; and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* No doubt he apprehended some immediate infliction of God's anger ; some avenging visitation upon himself, as the executor of unjust punishment. His notions of the wrath to come were probably indefinite ; but his fears were awakened ; and he felt himself to be a



guilty sinner, in need of forgiveness. The same awakening of conscience had been wrought, by the preaching of Peter, in three thousand souls; on the day of Pentecost, and had suggested the same earnest inquiry, *Men and brethren, what shall we do?\** The answer then was, *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.* The answer in this case was, *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.* Here is no mention of repentance: either because the jailor was already penitent and humbled; or because the Apostle knew, that there could be no true belief without repentance. To believe in Jesus Christ as a Saviour, implies a consciousness of sins, from the consequences of which he is to save us; and a consciousness of sin, and a sense of the consequences of sin, and a desire to be rescued from them, are the essential ingredients of repentance. Again, St. Peter said, *Repent, and be baptized*; St. Paul simply enjoined belief: but baptism was consequent upon belief, and therefore, in apostolic language, Be baptized, means, Repent and believe, and be baptized.

But what was the belief required of these

\* Acts ii. 37.

converts, as a prerequisite to their admission into the Church of Christ? Certainly not a belief in all the doctrines of the Gospel, separately and particularly considered: for although Paul and Silas *spake the word of the Lord to the keeper of the prison, and to all that were in his house,* they had not time to lay before him even a brief summary of all that Jesus had himself done and taught, and of all that he had instructed them by his Spirit to teach; for the narrative informs us, that *he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straitway.* He was of course prepared to believe implicitly all that Paul and Silas should declare to him, being satisfied that they were teachers sent from God. The articles of faith to which they required his immediate assent were undoubtedly these; that Jesus Christ was the Son of God; that he died on the cross for the sins of mankind, and rose again on the third day: these points at least, and possibly others; were proposed to him for his assent. This we may safely infer from a collation of instances. When the Ethiopian eunuch desired Philip to open to him that remarkable prophecy of Isaiah, which speaks of the Messiah as being led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as bearing the

iniquity of us all; *Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus;*\* that is, proved to him that all these prophecies applied to Jesus: and then, upon his requiring of the eunuch, who desired to be baptized, a profession of belief, he said; *I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.* Again, in the seventeenth chapter of the Acts, Paul is related to have reasoned with the Jews and proselytes out of the Scriptures, *opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you, is Christ.* And some of them, says St. Luke, *believed;* namely, that Jesus was the Christ, or Messiah, and therefore the Son of God; and that he had suffered death, and risen again from the dead. This, then, was the belief which carried with it salvation. It was the foundation, which the great master-builders of the Church laid for the superstructure of Christian holiness; *for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ;*† Christ the Son of God; Christ crucified; Christ risen; Christ the atoner, the mediator, the intercessor. From this root, so planted by the

\* Acts viii. 35.

† 1 Cor. iii. 11.

Apostles, watered by faithful teachers, increased by the Spirit of God, would naturally spring up all those opinions and affections and habits, which, combining together in perfect and unblemished symmetry, grow up into *trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord.\**

The instruction, which the Apostle and his companions had given to the converts at Philippi, although it had convinced them of the truth as it is in Jesus, and made them partakers in the grace of God, was yet not sufficient to ensure the perfection of Christian knowledge and practice, and to bring them to *the very measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.†* Those who believed, had still much to learn. We read of Apollos, that by his singular knowledge of the Scriptures, he *helped them much which had believed through grace.‡* The growth of the spiritual man is gradual; and requires attention, and the use of all the ordinary means of improvement, as well as the strengthening and refreshing dews of the Spirit.

It was probably for the purpose of giving further instruction in Gospel truth, that Luke was left behind at Philippi, when Paul and Silas

\* Is. lxi. 3.      † Ephes. iv. 13.      ‡ Acts xviii. 27.

went to Thessalonica. That he did remain there, we infer from his speaking of their departure in the third person; nor does he resume the narrative in the first person, till the fifth verse of the twentieth chapter.

In the seventeenth chapter the historian contrasts the obstinate, uninquiring bigotry, and worldly-mindedness of the Jews at Thessalonica, with the candour and disinterestedness of their countrymen at Berea, who manifested at the same time a perfect readiness of mind to receive that, which professed to be a revelation from God, and a sense of the duty incumbent upon every reasonable creature, to whom such a revelation is announced, of making the most careful and conscientious inquiry into the proofs of its authenticity. This is the true province and legitimate exercise of human reason; not first to look at the doctrines of an alleged revelation, and by them to judge of its truth or falsehood; but to ascertain the fact of its being a divine revelation, and then to *receive with meekness* the word, which is thus implanted, or *engrafted\** in their minds. *They searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.* The

\* James i. 21.

Bereans are designated as noble, because they searched the Scriptures, the undoubted oracles of God, to discover whether the preaching of the Apostles contradicted, or was agreeable to that infallible canon of truth. With what equity, or piety, can that proceeding be now condemned, in an inquirer after the revealed will of God, which was commended in those who heard the declarations of an Apostle? With what consistency can the pretended successor of St. Peter demand that implicit, uninquiring submission to his own interpretation of God's word, which St. Paul did not demand for himself? Contrast the conduct of these pious and wise Bereans, and the praise bestowed upon them by an inspired historian, with the denunciations of scriptural research which have issued from the citadel of Romish superstition; and even with the efforts which have been made within the last few years, and are still making, in a part of this Christian empire, by those who ought to be the lights and guides of the people, to prevent them from discovering in the Scriptures the whole counsel of God. Contrast the two pictures; and then determine, by this one criterion, which most resembles the primitive and catholic Church of Christ; our own Church, which declares, that "unto a Christian

man there can be nothing either more necessary or profitable than the knowledge of Holy Scripture;”\* or that of Rome, which declares, that “since it is manifest by experience, that, if the Holy Bible be permitted in the vulgar tongue, by reason of the rashness of men, more loss than profit will arise—he that without a written faculty from the Bishop or Inquisitor shall presume to have, or to read the Bible, may not receive absolution of his sins, except he first deliver up his Bible to the Ordinary.†

Let us pray, that He, who opened the heart of Lydia by the gentle influences of his Spirit, and beat down with an earthquake the pride and impenitence of the jailor at Philippi, and rewarded the pious curiosity of the Berean Jews with the discovery of himself, may bless the efforts of those, who are endeavouring to dispel so dreadful, so destructive a delusion; and direct the understandings and consciences of all men to the only sure test of truth and error, of right and wrong, the written and unchangeable word of God.

And with respect to ourselves, let us not

\* Homily on the Reading and Knowledge of Holy Scripture.

† Trent Expurgatory Index.

forget, that the indispensable qualifications for him who would exactly weigh the claims of revelation, or spiritually comprehend its doctrines, are a pure heart, and a right mind; a sincere desire to learn the will of God, and a determination to obey it, cost him what it may. But to those, who *love darkness better than light, because their deeds are evil,\** who are afraid lest the Gospel should be true, because if it be, it is their recorded sentence of condemnation; and to those, who desire to know no more of it than is consistent with their own opinions and pursuits—to both these classes the Scriptures are a sealed book. They may hear them read, as the Jews did in their synagogues, Sabbath after Sabbath; but the *vail remaineth untaken away upon their heart;†* and unless it be rent asunder by some force like that of an earthquake, how shall they turn to the Lord?

Lord, we beseech thee open our hearts to the things which thou hast spoken unto us by thy Spirit. Whether by the gentle breathings of thy grace, or, if needs be, by the awakening voice of thine anger, dispose us to listen to thy commands, to fear thy warnings, to love thy

\* John iii. 19.

† 2 Cor. iii. 14, 15.



promises, to assure ourselves of thy forgiveness, *to continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and not to be moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which we have heard.\**

\* Col. i. 23.

## LECTURE X.

ACTS xvii. 32.

*And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.*

To those persons, whose studies have made them conversant with the literature, and manners, and opinions of classical antiquity, few portions of the history, which is now under consideration, are more interesting than that, which relates the circumstances of St. Paul's visit to Athens. It was right that the Apostle of the Gentiles should preach the Gospel, in person, to a city, which, as to philosophy, and art, and science, had long been the metropolis, and was even then the school of the heathen world. Athens, the inventress of all learning ;\* Athens, the source from which humanity, science, religion, agriculture, jurisprudence,

\* Cic. de Orat. I. 4.

and laws were made known to all lands;\* these were the panegyric expressions, not of that self-commendation, in which a vain-glorious people indulged; but of the great orator of antiquity, who had himself imbibed the principles of a false philosophy, and the rules of a true eloquence, in the porticoes and groves of the intellectual city.

It was here that the Apostle was to encounter the demon of pagan superstition in his most formidable strong-hold; the ancient mythology of a refined and subtle people, illustrated by the genius of their most admired poets; endeared to them by the traditional recollections of their national vanity; embellished and adorned with the noblest monuments of art; and the more pertinaciously adhered to, and revered by the people, in proportion as they were debarred from the exercise of political rights, and deprived of that freedom which was of old their boast and their bane.

But this description is literally applicable only to the populace of Athens. The educated class of the community, who were all ranged under the banners of some philosophical sect, although for the sake of preserving as much as possible

\* Cic. pro Flacco, c. 26.

the ancient characteristics of their city, they insisted upon the maintenance of the old religion, and resisted innovation, were, in point of fact, freethinkers, sceptics, or atheists; with whom the externals of religion were a matter of derision and contempt, its essential doctrines a subject of speculation and wordy disputing.

Gifted as the Athenians were by nature with a quick perception, and a subtle understanding; professing to have discovered all that human reason *could* discover, of the nature and attributes of the Deity, it might reasonably be expected, that they would have emancipated themselves from the thralldom of ancient superstition, and that they would entertain such just and rational notions upon those principles of religion, which *God*, as the Apostle says, *has showed unto all men,\** as would have prepared them for the ready reception of the pure and simple revelations of the Gospel. *The eternal power and godhead* of the Creator were so far manifested to the understandings of mankind *by the things that are made,†* that an honest inquiry after truth would have led them, not only to a speculative disbelief, but to an absolute rejection of idolatry. *So that they were without excuse; because when*

\* Rom. i. 19.

† Rom. i. 20.

*they knew God* (that is, knew that there must be one supreme Creator) *they glorified him not as God*; did not pay to him that exclusive honour and worship which were due to the one true God; *neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.* These are the words of St. Paul himself; and we may therefore easily conceive the reflexions which passed through his mind, and filled him with a pious indignation, or, as St. Luke says, *stirred his spirit within him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.* The original word, which is more correctly rendered in the margin of our translation, *full of idols*, is very expressive of the fact to which the historian alludes. The city of Athens was proverbially crowded with temples, and altars, and statues. More than two centuries after the visit of St. Paul, a heathen author ridicules it on this account.\* Not only was it adorned with the more splendid monuments of genius and superstition, which crowned

\* Lucian Prometh. I.

its Acropolis, or studded its olive groves, but the images of gods and heroes met the passenger at every turn; and the meetings of the ways were distinguished by ancient pieces of sculpture, holden in such sacred estimation, that to have injured them was a capital accusation, the odium of which crushed the most distinguished of the Athenian citizens.\*

*Therefore*, continues the historian, speaking of St. Paul, *disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons* (worshippers of the true God), *and in the market daily, with them that met with him.* The word *market* would be more properly rendered *the public place*: of these there were several at Athens, to which resorted not only the men of business, but the philosophers, the politicians, and the idlers of the city. These were the places where Socrates, the great founder of practical philosophy, delivered those colloquial lectures, in which he had intimated the necessity of a divine instructor; and here a greater and wiser than Socrates spoke, to his crowd of promiscuous hearers, of *Jesus, and the resurrection.*

Now it appears, that the Jews had a synagogue in Athens; and that there were also

\* Alcibiades.

proselytes, persons who worshipped the one true God. There was, then, the less excuse for those who still continued idolaters. But we may collect from this fact, that if St. Paul had confined himself to a declaration of the truth, that there is one supreme God, the maker and preserver of the universe, his discourse would not have excited any attention, beyond what might have been awakened by his earnestness and eloquence. His doctrine would have been contradicted by one sect of philosophers, and his proofs would have been ridiculed by another; but the assertion of it would neither have surprised nor offended the Athenians, already accustomed to the religious peculiarities of the Jews, and to the simpler theism of the proselytes. But when he proceeded to insist upon those consequences of the doctrine in question, which had been matter of doubtful speculation to the philosopher, but had been brought to light by the Gospel; the immortality of the soul, and a judgment to come; the pride and the passions of his hearers revolted: and when he declared that fundamental truth of Christianity, upon which human reason had not even hazarded a conjecture, the resurrection of the same body; and when he proclaimed the crucified Jesus as the appointed

judge of mankind, he was treated as a visionary enthusiast.

His first opponents were *certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics*. There were at that time two other sects at Athens, the Academic and the Peripatetic. It is not said that the partizans of either had any controversy with St. Paul; probably because they were less bigoted to a particular set of opinions; especially the Academic philosophers, who professed to be constantly inquiring for that which presented the greatest appearance of truth; and who, therefore, could not consistently treat the doctrine of St. Paul with contempt or anger, for they themselves also maintained the immortality of the soul. Indeed, if the Apostle had confined his reasonings to a proof of that doctrine, which is suggested by the consciences of mankind, the belief of which is instinctive, and has been general in all ages of the world, he would have given no offence; although the authority upon which he grounded his assertion might have been treated by his hearers with contempt. But the doctrine which incurred their unmeasured ridicule, as it appeared to outrage all philosophy and experience, was the doctrine of a bodily resurrection. The transition of the disembodied



spirit into another earthly tabernacle they could comprehend; but not its reunion to the same body, once destroyed and dissipated by death.

But the philosophers of the Garden and the Porch were utterly disqualified, by the principles which they professed, for the reception of Gospel truth; the former being virtually atheists, either denying the existence of a God, or allowing him only an inert and inoperative existence, without any control over, or concern for mankind; the other, not indeed in terms rejecting the notion of a Deity, but arrogating to themselves an equality with him in point of virtue and merit.

These two sects of heathen philosophers had their parallels amongst the Jews, in the persons of the Sadducees and Pharisees; the former of whom were practically atheists as to belief, and dissolute as to conduct; while the latter, although they entertained juster notions of God than the Stoics, corrupted and nullified religion, as to its effects upon themselves, by their spiritual pride and arrogance. St. Paul was treated by the vain Athenians, as his blessed Master had been treated by the Pharisees and Sadducees; the one sort deriding him as a babler, for proclaiming the resurrection and a judgment to come; the other, opposing him as an innovator

in religion. *Some said, What will this babbler say? Other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods; because he preached unto them Jcsus, and the resurrection.*

Such also is the reception, which the preaching of the Gospel at all times encounters from those, who continue to be the faithful representatives of the Epicureans and Stoics; the profligate unbeliever, who will not, because he dares not, believe it to be true; and the conceited rationalist, who relies upon his own wisdom and virtue, rather than upon the grace of God; and chooses to rest in his own perfection, rather than be *complete in him which is the head of all principality and power.\**

Such were the men, *spoiled, by philosophy and vain deceit*, of those moral qualities which were required to fit them for the reception of divine truth, who *took Paul, and brought him into Areopagus*; not before the court of that name, but to the public place where it was accustomed to hold its sittings; a place of great resort for the gravest citizens and magistrates, as well as the orators and philosophers of Athens. Here they desired him to give an account of this *new doctrine* of which he spake, and of the

\* Col. ii. 10.

*strange things which he brought to their ears, in the presence of those who were best able to detect what was erroneous, and authorized to punish what was unlawful. Their object, however, was not to call the Apostle to account before a judicial tribunal, but, in the first instance, only to gratify their curiosity; for, adds the historian, as a reason of their proceeding, all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear something new.*

St. Paul, thus called upon to declare the principles of true religion, before an assembly of men who held the most discordant opinions, so framed his discourse, that every member of it touches upon, and refutes some erroneous notion of his hearers. He commences with a rebuke, couched in very gentle terms, which the philosophical part of his audience could not deny, because they pleaded guilty to the charge in their own discourses and disquisitions: *Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld the objects of your worship,\* I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. This*

\* τὰ σεβάσματα ὑμῶν, "your devotions." Rec. version, "the gods that ye worship." Margin.

fact is urged by St. Paul, as an extreme instance of their superstitiousness. Not content with dedicating a shrine, or an altar, or an image, to every god whose name was recorded in their Pantheon, for fear of offending by omission any of the myriads of their fabulous deities; they erected this altar to the Unknown God, or rather, as the inscription may be more correctly rendered, *to an unknown God*; not any deity or demigod in particular, but to any one who might happen to be omitted by name in the bead-roll of their superstition. Of this peculiarity St. Paul very skilfully took advantage, both to shelter himself from the imputation of being a setter forth of strange gods, and to awaken the curiosity and the pride of his hearers, by professing to relieve them from the absurdity of worshipping a god, of whom they did not even know the proper designation. *Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship*; that is, worship without knowing who is the real object of your adoration, *I declare*, or make known *unto you*. In addition to the many objects of your idolatry, whose titles and attributes ye profess to know, you appear to entertain an opinion, that there is some other deity, of whom you have no positive knowledge, who is yet entitled to your devotion and respect;

and so far your opinion is right. There is indeed a God, to whom your homage is due; and him I now declare unto you. It is no other than the supreme creator and governor of the universe, *God who made the world, and all things therein.* This proposition contradicted the opinions of two kinds of philosophers;\* those who maintained that the world was not the creation of a supreme intelligence, but the result of a fortuitous concourse of atoms; and those, who asserted that all things were eternally, and therefore independently existing.

The Apostle then proceeds to show, that the popular form of religion was as far removed from just and worthy notions of the Deity, as the scepticism of the philosophers. *Seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, he dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing; seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.* This assertion was directed against that mean and debasing notion of idol-worship, that the gods required habitation and sacrifice; a notion, against which it was necessary to caution even the people of God, by the voice of inspiration: *If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for*

\* The Epicureans and Peripatetics.

*the world is mine, and the fulness thereof.\**  
Even when a majestic temple was dedicated to the God of Israel by his own appointment, his spiritual and incomprehensible nature was declared to the worshippers in the very prayer of dedication: *Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven, and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have builded.†*

The Apostle proceeds: *And he hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on the face of the earth; and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.* This assertion seems to be directed against the followers of Epicurus and Aristotle; the former of whom pretended that man, like the world which he inhabits, was originally produced by an accidental combination of matter; the latter supposed the human race to have existed from eternity. But it was not without its bearing upon a favourite tradition of the Athenian people, who prided themselves upon being sprung from the actual soil of the country in which they dwelt.

St. Paul then declares, that God created man a reasonable and accountable being, endued with

\* Ps. l. 12.

† 1 Kings viii. 27.

the power of learning the divine will, and answerable for the exercise of that power. *That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.* This expression graphically describes both the strength and the weakness of human reason, when employed in the investigation of things pertaining to God. There are, on the face of nature, and on the surface of human affairs, marks and traces of the wisdom and goodness and providence of God, abundantly sufficient to awaken curiosity, and irresistibly to suggest a belief of his existence, or rather to confirm that belief which is suggested by God himself to the consciences of mankind. But it is by careful inquiry, and cautious induction, and a pious modesty, that the mind, unassisted by divine light, feels after, and ascertains the existence and attributes of God, and finds out Him who is not far from every one of us; *for in him,* continues the Apostle, *we live, and move, and have our being: as certain also of your own poets have said, For we also are his offspring.* This quotation from one of their own authors who had lived three hundred years before, was made by St. Paul, not for the purpose of displaying his acquaintance with the literature of Greece

(although that circumstance would tend to conciliate the favour of his hearers), but because he knew the weight which the common people attached to the testimony of their poets, whom they considered as the great masters of morality and religion. And this is another remarkable instance of the sagacity and address, with which this great and wise Apostle *became all things to all men, that by all means he might save some.* Convinced as he was of the intrinsic worthlessness of human learning, when compared with the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and of its inefficiency as an instrument of propagating the Gospel, except when employed in subordination to spiritual principles and graces, he did not scruple to avail himself of its resources, wheresoever they could be made subservient to the great ends of his preaching, which he wisely varied according to the temper and prepossessions of his hearers; sometimes availing himself even of their erroneous predilections, and aiming at them a shaft taken from their own quiver.

If St. Paul had spoken to the Athenians, in his first address, of Moses and the Prophets, of God's selection of a peculiar people, of his promise of a Redeemer, and that Redeemer a crucified Redeemer, he would scarcely have found a hearer.



But when he reasoned with them upon principles, with which the discussions of their own philosophers had rendered them familiar, and confirmed his arguments by a reference to authorities which they admitted, he was listened to with patience and interest; and it was not till he proceeded, from the elementary truths of religion, discoverable by human reason, to the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel revelation, that some of his hearers mocked.

It has been justly remarked, that the conduct of St. Paul at Athens is a model for those who are sent to preach the Gospel in heathen lands.\* His piety does not deprive him of prudence; his zeal does not outrun his discretion. He does not attempt to gain the ear of the idolater, by violently attacking his favourite notions, without any precaution or reserve. But he endeavours to find out some common ground, upon which they may meet as friends; some common principles, to which both may appeal. The surest way of bringing a man to acknowledge his errors is, to give him full credit for so much as he has discovered of the truth. One thing is certain, that in the cause of missions, as in every other

\* Townsend's Chronological Arrangement of the New Testament, Vol. II. p. 244.

department of his providential government, God works by instruments and means; and blesses the right use of those faculties, which he has given us for the purpose of setting forward his glory, and the good of mankind: and therefore the prudence and discretion, which are necessary in all our undertakings, are most indispensable in that which is, perhaps, the most difficult of all.

Having thus taken up his position upon authority which his hearers could not dispute, St. Paul proceeds to draw a conclusion, which, opposite as it was to the practice of the Athenians, followed from the principles which they admitted: *Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.* Had the Apostle been reasoning with Jews, he would have appealed to those sublime passages in the Psalms and prophetic writings, which declare the folly as well as sinfulness of idolatry; but to the Athenians his argument is this: We are all the creatures of God's hand: that is a truth asserted by your own poets, and admitted by yourselves. How contrary then to reason and sense, that the creatures should pretend to make the Creator,

and that too out of materials which owe their existence to him!

But St. Paul contents himself with proving in few words the unreasonableness and folly of such a proceeding; and knowing that no argument could be urged in vindication of it, he forbears from all unnecessary reproach, which might set the passions of his hearers in opposition to their reason; and thinks it wise to suggest an excuse for their past conduct, that they might the more readily acknowledge the necessity of reforming it. *The times of this ignorance God winked at: or rather, having overlooked the times of this ignorance, he now commandeth all men every where to repent.* So, in his address to the people of Lystra, he had said, *We preach unto you, that ye should turn from these vanities to the living God, which made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein. Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.\** Not that the heathen world stood altogether excused in the sight of God, seeing that *he left not himself without witness; having showed unto them, by all his demonstrations of power and goodness, that which might be known of him;†* but the ignorance of a partially informed and

\* Acts xiv. 15.

† Rom. i. 19.

unassisted reason was more excusable than an obstinate perseverance in error, after a distinct and authoritative revelation of the truth. *He now commandeth all men every where to repent : because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained ; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.* In this sentence, for the first time, St. Paul contradicted and surprised *all* his hearers. Every other part of his discourse would be assented to by some, perhaps by the greater part of his audience ; but *when they heard of the resurrection of the dead*, there was a general outcry in the assembly, and they would hear no more. *Some mocked, and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter :* the former probably being the Epicureans, who derided, and the common people who did not understand, the notion of a resurrection ; the latter, some of the philosophers, who were forced to acknowledge the justness of the Apostle's reasoning, but were not prepared to receive this novel doctrine of a bodily resurrection, nor to confess their ignorance in the presence of the people.

But the reception, which this doctrine met with, was not owing altogether to its novelty, nor

to its supposed contradiction to common sense and experience; but to its connexion with a judgment to come. And this peculiarity of the Christian revelation has been from the first, and ever will be, the great obstacle to its reception with the children of this world. The difficulties of revealed religion offend the intellectual pride of the philosopher, who proceeds upon the principle of believing nothing which he cannot understand. But it is by its awful disclosures of the purposes of God, that it alarms and offends the more numerous class of practical unbelievers, the sensualist, the profligate, the worldly-minded, and the careless; who *love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil*.\* They are afraid, and unwilling to admit the truth of that revelation, which pronounces sentence of condemnation upon themselves; knowing that if God has indeed *appointed a day, wherein he will judge the world in righteousness*, they must either forsake and abjure their dearest pleasures and pursuits, or perish everlastingly. Such unbelievers are unbelievers by choice. They wish that the Gospel may not be true; and therefore they will not inquire whether it be so, lest they should be convinced against their will: and if at any time they are

\* John iii. 19.

unexpectedly awakened to a perception of the truth, by a powerful discourse, or an argument pressed home to their conscience, they shrink back from its advances; and when they are afraid to mock, they are eager to procrastinate; *we will hear thee again of this matter.* But we do not read, that the Athenian unbelievers ever heard the Apostle again. He *departed from among them.*

Let us beware of wasting or rejecting the opportunities, which God affords us, of religious instruction and improvement, lest they should be altogether withdrawn. He proposes the evidences of the Gospel, and warns us by the suggestions of his Spirit; and reasons with us by his Word and his ministers; and he is *long-suffering and of great goodness.* But his long-suffering is abused, and his goodness set at nought by those, who treat with contempt, or indifference, a single declaration and enforcement of Gospel truth; and if that single declaration should be the last which is to be made to them, they will have no right to complain, if they are left to perish in their unbelief.

Labour then to make the best use of the spiritual opportunities which are afforded you, while God is pleased to continue them; profit by the

ministry of faithful teachers, while such are to be found ; lest, if you continue unconverted and unfruitful, the Lord of the vineyard should cause them *to depart from you*, as Paul departed from the Athenians, and leave you to irreclaimable ignorance, and hopeless infidelity. May he impart to *us* a larger measure of the zeal, and boldness, and prudence of that great Apostle, and to *you* an inquiring and a teachable spirit ; that He, who *to the Jews was a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness*, may be *unto us who are called, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.*\*

\* 1 Cor. i. 24.

## LECTURE XI.



ACTS xviii. 9.

*Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision,  
Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace.*

WHEN Paul turned away from Athens, despairing of making any salutary impression upon that strong-hold of idolatry and false philosophy, the Holy Spirit suffered him to depart, as from a people, the time of whose conversion was not yet come. But when, after a short sojourn at Corinth, he had not only converted the chief ruler of the synagogue, but many of the Corinthians also believed and were baptized, *Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace. For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city; not many people who were already believers in Christ; but many who were sincerely desirous of*



learning the truth, and prepared to receive the Gospel with *an honest and good heart*. This is the description of persons alluded to, when it is said, *as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed*.\*

St. Paul informs us, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, that he had baptized in that city none but Crispus, and Gaius, and the household of Stephanas;† but, as we read in the Acts, that *many* of the Corinthians believed and were baptized, we may infer, that the ceremony of baptism was performed by his attendants. Of the two branches of that commission, which was delivered by Christ to his Apostles, *Go teach all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*, one only appears to have been insisted upon in the special instructions given to St. Paul, for he says, *Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the Gospel*.‡ We are not, however, to understand from this expression, that St. Paul thought baptism an unimportant ceremony, or himself at liberty to dispense with it; but that, while others around him administered the outward rite of admission into the Church of Christ, he himself had been employed in the more difficult and

\* Acts xiii. 48.      † 1 Cor. i. 13.      ‡ 1 Cor. i. 17.

important work of preaching the Gospel, and of preparing his hearers for admission into the Church of Christ. And when he thanked God, that he had baptized none of the Corinthians, but Crispus and Gaius and Stephanas, it was because he had thus given no pretence to any of the parties, into which the Church was divided, to say, that he had baptized in his own name. That he *preached* in his own name, they could not lay to his charge; for he appealed to the Corinthians as witnesses, that *he preached not himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and himself their servant for Jesus' sake.\**

From the encouragement given him in a vision, *Be not afraid, but speak and hold not thy peace*; it may appear, that the Apostle laboured under a sense of his personal deficiencies, and a diffidence of his powers of persuasion, which he had exerted to so little purpose at Athens; and which he was perhaps reluctant again to put to the proof, before the learned inhabitants of one of the most polished cities of Greece. This notion is confirmed by his own expressions to the Corinthians, in the tenth chapter of his second Epistle: *Now I Paul myself beseech you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ; who in*

\* 2 Cor. iv. 5.

*presence, or outward appearance, am base among you, but being absent, am bold towards you—his letters (say they) are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.* Whatever may have been the cause, it is certain, that even an Apostle stood in need of spiritual encouragement in the discharge of his sacred duties. And what minister of Christ does not feel the want of such comfort and support, when he reflects on the magnitude and unspeakable importance of the work to which he is called; the foes which he has to encounter; the obstacles to be beaten down; and the infinite value of the souls, whose eternal welfare may perhaps depend upon the success of his labours? *for we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the savour of death unto death, and to the other the savour of life unto life: and who is sufficient for these things?\** Who indeed is sufficient? Not he, who relies entirely upon *enticing words of man's wisdom;*† upon the stores of his learning, or the power of his eloquence; but he, who knows the true value of human acquirements, as instruments of ministerial usefulness; who, in the simplicity of an

\* 2 Cor. ii. 15.

† 1 Cor. ii. 4.

entire devotion to the cause of Christ, and with a confidence in its prevailing excellence, and acknowledging his *sufficiency to be of God,\** by *manifestation of the truth, commends himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God;†* not compromising, nor concealing the truth, for fear of offending the prejudices, or incurring the ridicule of those, who, like the Jews at Corinth, *oppose themselves and blaspheme,* or like Gallio, *care for none of these things;‡* but doing faithfully *the work of an evangelist, reproof, rebuking, exhorting;* while the voice of the master, whom he serves, prevails against the suggestions of a false shame, and the clamours of an opposing world; *Be not afraid; but speak, and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee.*

In the eighteenth and nineteenth chapters we find two instances recorded of persons, who had been baptized either by John or his disciples, and who had been prepared by their preaching for the coming of the Messiah; and are yet supposed not to have been aware that the Messiah was already come. In that case they could not have heard either Jesus or any of his Apostles; and it would then be probable that they had not been baptized by John himself, but by some

\* 2 Cor. iii. 5. † 2 Cor. iv. 2. ‡ Acts xviii. 17.

of his disciples, who had quitted Judæa before the miracles and preaching of Jesus had excited attention: or perhaps by some of those, who doubted whether Jesus were the Christ, and whose doubts were not removed by the sublime answer which he gave to them, when they were sent to him by the Baptist.

But it appears to me, that both Apollos, and the Ephesian disciples, had in fact heard of Jesus Christ, and believed him to be the Messiah announced by John the Baptist; but that they were imperfectly acquainted with the nature of the Gospel revelation, and ignorant of the necessity of entering into the Church of Christ by baptism. St. Luke says of Apollos, that he was *instructed in the way of the Lord*; had learned the rudiments of Gospel truth; understood the meaning of those prophecies which foretold the coming of Christ, and knew that they had been accomplished in the person of Jesus, and was able to prove this by the Scriptures; for *he taught diligently, or accurately, the things of the Lord*; but yet he did not understand the nature, nor the dimensions, nor the efficacy of that faith in a crucified Redeemer, which could reconcile a sinner to his God; nor the indispensableness of something more than repentance, to qualify him for an

inheritance in the kingdom of heaven; for he knew only the baptism of John: and John, as St. Paul afterwards told the Ephesian disciples, *baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.*

The baptism of John was the symbolical expression of that repentance, by which sinners were prepared to seek for the remission of sins through the coming Saviour. But both repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ as a Saviour, were required of those, who desired to obtain that remission; and these were to be testified by that baptism, which was administered in the names of the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier of mankind. This neither Apollos nor the twelve at Ephesus understood: but that they had heard of Jesus, and that they believed him to be the person spoken of by John, cannot, I think, be disputed. This is implied in the expression, that *Aquila and Priscilla took unto them Apollos, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly;* and by the phrase, *certain disciples;* for the word *disciples*, so employed by itself, can only mean, in the history of the Apostles, Christian disciples.

We find, in the case of the Ephesian converts, a proof, that the faith, which the Apostles required in those whom they baptized, and about the sincerity of which they could not be deceived, was not always, and of necessity, a fruitful faith. A Christian life did not in every case follow the profession of a Christian faith, even such a profession as satisfied an Apostle. It appears that many of the Ephesians, who had embraced Christianity, continued to practise those arts of sorcery and witchcraft, which prevailed in the cities of Asia; nor was it until the pretended exorcists had been signally discomfited by the evil spirit, whom they adjured in the name of Jesus, that these inconsistent professors of the true religion came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.

The story of *Demetrius the silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, and brought no small gain to the craftsmen*, is a perfect instance of bigotry, engendered, or confirmed, by self-interest: and the clamours of the assembly, who were drawn together by his outcries, are a specimen of the arguments, by which popular prejudice, or ignorance, rejects and silences the modest expostulations of truth: *When Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people, they all with one*

*voice, about the space of two hours, cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.*

This complaint of Demetrius proves incidentally the great effect which had been produced by the preaching of Paul. He continued at Ephesus *by the space of two years*; probably for the same reason that our Saviour appears to have resided much at Capernaum, because it was a place of great resort; *so that all they which dwell in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.* It was in consequence of a falling off in the demand for the idol-shrines of Diana, which were sold to the worshippers who came from all parts of the heathen world to her temple, that the craftsmen took the alarm. The narrative might easily be paralleled from the history of the relic-mongers and pardon-venders of the Romish Church.

In the twentieth chapter is preserved the solemn and affecting charge, which St. Paul delivered to the elders of the Church at Ephesus, whom he had sent for to Miletus, to take leave of them, upon his departure for Jerusalem. He first reminds them, that the whole tenour of his conduct, and the circumstances of his life amongst them, had been such as to evince his sincerity: *Ye know, from the first day that I came into*



*Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations which beset me by the lying in wait of the Jews.* The first proof of the Christian ministry is, to serve the Lord with all humility; the second, to endure afflictions. The Christian's humility, and especially the Christian minister's, looks towards God and man. Towards God; *I am not meet to be called an apostle. But, by the grace of God I am what I am.\*—And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me; for that he hath counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.†* Towards man; *In lowliness of mind, esteeming others better than himself:‡* having the same mind which was also in Christ Jesus; § *putting on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering.¶*

The Apostle thus continues his appeal: *How I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you; but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, (or rather in private houses) testifying both to the Jews and*

\* 1 Cor. xv. 9.

† 1 Tim. i. 12.

‡ Phil. ii. 3.

§ Phil. ii. 5.

¶ Col. iii. 12.

*also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

This is the third point of faithfulness in the Christian minister, to keep back nothing that is profitable to his hearers: not to be deterred—by an unworthy fear of shocking their prejudices, or thwarting their favourite opinions, or exciting their displeasure by the condemnation of practices in which they indulge—from declaring the whole counsel of God; from declaring it, though not without discretion, yet without reserve, and without respect of persons. It is his duty to consider, not what will be agreeable to them, but what will be profitable; to prophesy, not smooth, but salutary things; not to soothe a gangrene with anodynes, but to cure it, if needs be, with the knife and the cautery. To the ungodly and the careless he insists principally upon *repentance towards God*; to the self-righteous, the rationalist, the asserter of his own meritorious worthiness, upon *faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*.

*And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit, (or constrained by the Spirit influencing my determination) unto Jerusalem: not knowing the things that shall befall me there; but anxious, probably, to make one vigorous effort more to reclaim his countrymen from their almost*

hopeless infidelity ; anxious also, perhaps, to find consolation, and encouragement, and counsel, amongst the Apostles and elders, who still remained in that city. *Not knowing the things that shall befall me there ; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.* Not long afterwards, the Apostle received a more precise intimation from a certain prophet, named Agabus, of the trials which awaited him at Jerusalem, where he was to be imprisoned and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles ; and he had been prepared for the worst that could befall him, by that brief but emphatic warning of his Lord, which although he did not hear it with his own ears, he had learned from the other Apostles, and had already seen exemplified in their case and his own : *Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But,* continues St. Paul, *none of these things move me ; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*

So speaks the Apostle in the history ; now hear him in his own Epistle : *I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in*

*persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong.\** The faithful servant of Christ sits down, and counts the cost, before he undertakes the active duties of a ministry, which requires of him many sacrifices, and will expose him to many trials. As there is no concord between Christ and Belial, so neither can there be any friendship or agreement between their servants respectively. He who has *no fellowship with the works of darkness, but reproves them,†* must expect to be disliked by the workers of them. He, who *exhorts and rebukes the ungodly with all authority;‡* whose duty and office it is, to preserve and point out the broad and ineffaceable boundary line between right and wrong, must expect to encounter ridicule, reproach, and slander. And he must learn to regard all these trials as proofs of his own faithfulness; as the unwilling testimony borne by an ungodly world to the success of his labours in the cause of Christ. If one Apostle could *glory in tribulations§* of the sharpest kind; and if another *counted it all joy when he fell into divers temptations||*—such tribulations and such temptations as have now, thanks be to God, ceased to

\* 2 Cor. xii. 10.      † Eph. v. 11.      ‡ Tit. ii. 15.

§ Rom. v. 3.

|| James i. 2.

vex the Church of Christ, or his ministers;—if, in later days, a Cranmer, a Ridley, and a Latimer, did not count their life dear to themselves, so that they might bear testimony to the truth by their death, and seal the charter of religious freedom with their blood; how little excuse is left for the timid and time-serving minister of the Gospel, who trembles at the thought of awakening the resentments of profane and profligate men, enemies of the cross of Christ; who temporizes, and holds parley with the powers of darkness; calls by soft and inoffensive names practices, which his code of instructions broadly condemns; and doubtfully insinuates, rather than proclaims with authority, the strict unbending rules, and awful prohibitions of the everlasting Gospel. Such ministers of Christ, who are not fully emancipated from the bondage of false opinions, and worldly sentiments, and selfish fears, cannot appeal, as St. Paul did, to those amongst whom they have laboured in the Lord: *I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.* But the trials of our courage and perseverance are many and fearful; and we have great need, my brethren, that you should pray

for us, *that utterance may be given unto us, that we may open our mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel; that therein we may speak boldly, as we ought to speak.\**

The concluding part of St. Paul's valedictory discourse to the elders of the Asiatic churches, reminds them, that the flock, entrusted to their spiritual care, was so entrusted by the Holy Ghost; and that their office was, to feed with wholesome doctrine the Church of God, not merely because they had been set over it by the Spirit of God, but because the Son of God had purchased it with his blood. That, for which so great a price had been paid, must needs be a precious charge. The Redeemer *gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish,†* and the degree, in which it shall correspond to this requirement, must mainly depend upon the faithfulness of those, who are appointed to build it up with the words of sound doctrine, and the power of holy example; and to watch against

\* Ephes. vi. 19.

† Ephes. v. 26.

*the grievous wolves that enter in, of infidelity, or error, or ungodliness.*

The Apostle, in the last place, reminds his hearers of that, which had been a constant theme of his preaching, as it is of the very essence of Gospel morality, a self-denying, active charity: *I have showed you all things, how that so labouring, (that is, as I did, with mine own hands ministering unto my necessities, and to them that were with me) ye ought to support the weak; (those who are unable to labour for themselves) and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.\** This declaration of our Lord is not recorded in any of the Gospels; but was remembered and preserved by the disciples, amongst whom, in the first age of the Church, many sayings of Jesus Christ must have been current, which were not committed to writing by the Evangelists, who, as they profess to have written only a part even of the miracles which he wrought, would certainly not have attempted to give a transcript of all that he said. Other sentences are ascribed to our Saviour by some of the earlier writers of the Church, and may probably have been spoken by him. But we do

\* Acts xx. 34.

not ascribe divine authority to any traditional records, but those which are expressly contained in the writings of the Apostles and Evangelists.

The remaining part of St. Paul's adventures, as recorded by St. Luke, will form the subject of my concluding lecture. A very brief and cursory survey only can be taken of them, as illustrating the courage, and zeal, and wisdom, of that wonderful man, and the providence of God, as displayed in the first settlement of his Church.

We are not to suppose, that while Paul was labouring, and journeying, and encountering peril and hardship of every kind, the other Apostles were less diligently employed, in laying the foundations, and rearing the fabric of that Church. St. James, as we learn from the twenty-first chapter of the Acts, presided over the Church at Jerusalem as its first Bishop; and, therefore, as the first Bishop of the Christian world. Peter, as we collect from his Epistles, was labouring in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Of the provinces, in which the other Apostles executed their commission, we have a less certain tradition in the earlier historians of the Church: but a sure proof that their labour was not fruitless, is the fact, that by their preaching, the name



of Jesus was made known, within a few years after his resurrection, to every province of the Roman empire.

The history of St. Paul's ministry, or rather of a certain period of his ministry, is recorded as a specimen of apostolical zeal and activity in general. It is a single portrait, drawn in the liveliest colours by the hand of a master-artist, and suspended in the school of Christian instruction, to serve as a model and encouragement to those, who are called to the like ministry with the great original; and from whom the Lord, who has called them, expects the same faithfulness, and the same exertions, in proportion to the door which is opened to them, in setting forward the cause of his Gospel, and the salvation of mankind. May all those, who have laid the burthen of that duty upon their own souls, have grace to shadow out, in their ministry, the lineaments of that perfect example; that *when the chief Shepherd shall appear, they may receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*\*

\* 1 Pet. v. 4.

## LECTURE XII.

EPHES. iii. 1.

*Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for the Gentiles.*

IT has been already observed, that the character and conduct of St. Paul ought to be carefully studied by all those, who are sent, like him, but with a less direct and authoritative commission, to preach the Gospel to heathen nations ; to be studied, as presenting a model, not only of fervent zeal, and unwearied activity, but of sagacity, and judgment, and discretion. His was not that blind and turbulent enthusiasm, which rushes strait forward to its object, regardless of intervening obstacles and difficulties ; nor that worldly cunning, which seeks to achieve apparent success, at the expense of sacred principle ; but a steady, considerate, well-regulated zeal, unconquerable indeed by persecution, and unmixed with any

worldly or selfish motives, but guided by the principles of sound reason, and common sense, to choose and to pursue the surest, as well as the holiest methods of accomplishing its purposes. He complied with the innocent prejudices, and studied the unavoidable prepossessions of his hearers, so far as to conciliate their kindness, and to ensure their attention; but never so far, as to sanction an error, which affected any material point of religious belief or practice. In how great a degree the work of evangelizing the heathen has been impeded, in the later ages of Christ's Church, by the inconsiderate and eager zeal of some preachers of the Gospel, and by the temporizing and unholy weakness of others, the annals of Christian missions too plainly declare. Let all, who are entrusted with a dispensation of the Gospel, but especially those, who are charged with the arduous duty of conveying it to the nations that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, bear in mind, that if they are to tread in the footsteps of St. Paul, they must strive to imitate the whole of his ministerial character in its happy proportions and combinations. They may possess a measure of his ardour in the cause of Christ, of his affectionate concern for the salvation of mankind, of his laborious perseverance,

his boldness, his patient endurance ; but, as they must not expect the same infusion of spiritual gifts and powers, they must be the more diligent in completing the resemblance in its remaining features, by copying his wisdom, his considerateness, his judicious discrimination of character, and his happy choice of arguments.

There is another feature in the conduct of St. Paul, which deserves to be pointed out, in contrast to the foolish enthusiasm of some missionaries, and preachers of the Gospel, who have considered it a part of their duty, in that character, to court, or at least not to avoid, persecution. St. Paul was never deterred by the fear of persecution from proclaiming the truth as it is in Jesus ; but he did not scruple to decline it, when he could do so without betraying the cause which he was engaged to maintain. Not to mention other instances of this, which occur in the Acts of the Apostles, I may refer you to his conduct at Jerusalem, as related in the twenty-second chapter. When the chief captain gave orders that he should be examined by scourging, he escaped that punishment, by asserting his character of a Roman citizen ; *Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?\**

\* Acts xxii. 25.

Again, when he was brought before the council, and perceived that the chief priests and scribes were bent upon his destruction, he took advantage of the circumstance, *that the one part of them were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees,\** to make a declaration which he knew would set them against each other, and probably divert their resentment, for the time at least, from himself: *Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude (that is, the great body of the council) was divided.*

· Upon that occasion the scribes, that were of the sect of the Pharisees, asserted the cause of Paul against the violence of their opponents, not because they regarded him, or his doctrines, with favour, as being themselves sincere lovers of the truth; but from a hatred of the Sadducees, and from a spirit of party, which urged them to defend a member of their own sect, however odious and offensive to them on other grounds, rather than acknowledge, in presence of their adversaries, that he was a preacher of false doctrines: *We*

\* Acts xxiii. 6.

*find no evil in this man ; but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken unto him, let us not fight against God.* A somewhat similar counsel had before been given by Gamaliel, but probably from different motives : *Refrain from these men, and let them alone : for if this counsel or this work be of man, it will come to nought : but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it ; lest haply ye be found to fight against God.\** But neither did Gamaliel, in the case of Peter and his brethren, nor did the Pharisees, in that of St. Paul, pursue their reasoning, till it should land them in the right conclusion : If by opposing this counsel, and persecuting these men, we should be fighting against God ; then, by neglecting and disregarding their doctrines, we are despising God, and rejecting his counsel : if it be dangerous to oppose them, it must be sinful not to follow them.

It appears, from the narrative of St. Luke, that the Jews who *banded together, and bound themselves under a curse*, to kill Paul, were encouraged by the chief priest and elders : † these therefore must have been of the sect of Sadducees : and when Ananias and the elders accused him before Felix, Paul declared that they had *found*

\* Acts v. 38.

† Acts xxiii. 12, 14.

*no evil doing in him, while he stood before the council, except it were for that one voice, or expression, that he cried, standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead, I am called in question by you this day.* In the fifth chapter of the Acts, it is expressly said, that the then high priest, Caiaphas, and his family, were Sadducees. What a dreadful revolution was that in the government of God's people, which had seated in the pontifical chair, and invested with the consecrated symbols of spiritual authority, the profligate, the scoffer, and the atheist! Well did it beseem the hypocrite, whom the Apostle indignantly designated as *a whited wall*; who hated, if he admitted the existence of that God, whom he professed to serve; well did it beseem *him* to be the foremost amongst the persecutors of Paul, the single-hearted, the persuasive, the fearless preacher of the resurrection, and a judgment to come. It is impossible for the reflecting Christian to peruse this portion of the Apostolic history, without calling to mind that era of the Christian Church, when the truth was opposed, and its asserters persecuted by unbelieving and profligate men, high priests over the house of God, and lords over his heritage, fierce maintainers of all the

corruptions of religion, and relentless enemies of its sincere professors, in proportion as they themselves disbelieved the foundations of its authority, and were ignorant of its spiritual energies. We learn, from the historian of the Jews, that the Sadducees, who laughed to scorn the notions of a resurrection and a judgment to come, were remarkable for their severity, and for their pitiless infliction of the most cruel punishments. Other points of resemblance might easily be discovered; but the course which is pursued by the enemies of divine truth is in all ages much the same. The mistaken zeal of the bigot, who *verily thinks with himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*, when it is preached otherwise than suits his prejudices; and the politic intolerance of the hypocrite, whether in the Jewish or the Christian Church, have raised the same clamour against the apostles of truth: *We have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition throughout the world.*

In answer to this accusation, St. Paul declares, that his accusers had not *found him in the temple disputing with any man; neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city.* They knew that the charge of sedition was likely



to awaken the jealousy of the Roman governor; for the Jews were a turbulent and rebellious people, ready to follow the auspices of any pretender, who promised to deliver them from the yoke of a servitude which they abhorred. By this argument they had determined the wavering resolution of Pilate; *If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend* :\* whereas the Roman magistrates in these provinces treated with contempt the prejudices and jealousies of the Jews respecting their religion; "*If it be a question of words, and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters.*" † With such words did Gallio drive the Jews from the judgment-seat.

St. Paul was described by the hired orator of his Jewish accusers, as *a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes*. The word, which is here translated *sect*, is in the fourteenth verse rendered *heresy*. It signifies the adoption of a distinct and peculiar set of opinions; and as the fourteenth verse is St. Paul's answer to the charge which is contained in the fifth, the same version should be employed in both cases. Let us observe the candour and courageous sincerity of the Apostle. The false and calumnious

\* John xix. 12.

† Acts xviii. 15.

accusations of his enemies, he repelled with the just indignation of conscious innocence. But the real cause of their hatred, and the true front of his offending, he confessed and gloried in: *But this I confess to thee; that after the way which they call heresy, (or sect) so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets.* In this ingenuous and simple confession, St. Paul displays his usual judgment and sagacity. His accuser had employed an invidious term; *the sect of the Nazarenes.* What that sect was, Felix in all likelihood did not know: but he would conclude, from the manner in which the phrase was employed, that it was a seditious and dangerous party. St. Paul, therefore, while he confessed that he was one of those whom they called Nazarenes, denied that he belonged to a *sect*, in their sense of the word, as a subverter of the national religion; but acknowledged that he was, in that character, a strict worshipper of the God of his and their fathers; (a line of conduct essential, in the eyes of a Roman, to the perfection of a good citizen) believing all things written in the law and the prophets. *And, he adds, I have hope towards God, which they themselves also allow* (not indeed Ananias and his Sadducean

party, but the Jewish nation in general), *that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself*, or make it the chief object of my care and diligence, *to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.* It is my study and endeavour, not to transgress or neglect any of those religious observances towards God, which are prescribed to me as a Jew by his ritual law ; nor any of those duties towards men, which the moral law requires. This, I think, is the meaning of St. Paul's expression ; as in the beginning of the twenty-third chapter, where he says, *Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God, until this day*, I conceive the meaning to be, I have lived in all respects as a true and sincere subject of God under the law of Moses.

When Felix had heard St. Paul's defence of himself, *having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, till Lysias the chief captain should come.* The simplest and the most probable interpretation of these words is undoubtedly this ; that Felix, having a clearer notion of the true nature of Christianity, from the account just given him by St. Paul, and perceiving that it had been grossly misrepresented,

deferred giving judgment, as the Jews desired. And he permitted Paul to enjoy as much liberty as was consistent with his safe keeping, commanding the centurion, to whom he was given in charge, *that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister, or to come unto him.*

Although by this show of lenity, the Roman Governor might hope to obtain from Paul some of the money which he had brought to Jerusalem;\* yet it appears, that some impression had been made upon him by the pleading of the Apostle; for *after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, whom he had probably about that time seduced from her legitimate husband; he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.* He sent for him, as it should seem, more to gratify his own curiosity, or perhaps that of Drusilla, than from any sincere desire to ascertain the real claims of the Gospel upon the belief and obedience of mankind. But the Gospel asserted and enforced those eternal principles of truth and justice, which God had made known to all mankind by conscience, his interpreter; and it enforced them with that sanction, which conscience required and longed for, but which

\* Acts xxiv. 17, 26.

reason could never supply, the certainty of a future retribution. And therefore, as Paul *reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.* The plainest rules of justice, or righteousness, he had violated, as well by his oppressive and rapacious misgovernment, as by depriving the king of the Emesenes of his wife. Of his disregard of temperance his appearance with Drusilla was a sufficient proof. No wonder then, if the word of God, driven home to his conscience by the eloquence of an inspired teacher, with all its unqualified denunciations of wrath against the workers of ungodliness, was found *sharper than any two-edged sword, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.\** He trembled; but that was all. He trembled, with the involuntary shudder of conscious guilt; with the fear, which inspires a horror of the consequences of sin, but works not a detestation of its nature. Apprehensive that the Apostle would press his arguments still more irresistibly, and force him upon the fearful alternative of utterly forsaking, or everlastingly perishing in his sin, he stopped him short with an adjournment of the trial, in which he was sensible that conscience was about to give.

\* Heb. iv. 12.

judgment against him: *Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.* The convenient season came; but such seasons, when suffered once to pass away from us unimproved, rarely indeed return to any good purpose. The trembling of the conscience-stricken Felix was but as the ruffling of the surface, when a stone falls into the mantling pool. The waters are divided, and their stillness is disturbed for a moment; but there is no continued nor salubrious agitation.

The trembling heart, and the thoughtful head, were soon otherwise occupied, one with intemperate desires, the other with the schemes of avarice; for *he hoped that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him; wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.* As Agrippa, when Paul appealed to Moses and the prophets, and to the knowledge which his hearer had of the events that had happened to the fulfilment of their prophecies in the person of Jesus Christ, exclaimed, *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian;* so, when the Apostle reasoned with Felix of those duties, which his conscience acknowledged, but his practice had so grossly violated; and declared the certainty of that

expectation of a future judgment, which haunts even the hardened sinner; his agitation and terror seemed to say, *Almost thou persuadest me to repent.* But it was only an *almost*; for immediately he says to Paul, what he ought to have said to sin, *Go thy way.* He was convinced, for the time, by the reasoning of the Apostle; he believed that there would be a day, *on which God would judge the world in righteousness*; or he would not have trembled. But he resisted conviction, and *loved darkness rather than light, because his deeds were evil*; and forced himself to disbelieve that, which he was afraid might be true; and therefore he affected to treat the awful doctrines, and powerful reasonings of the Apostle, as the dreams of a doating superstition. He informed Festus that when Paul's *accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as he had supposed: but had certain questions against him of their own superstition; and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.\** With the same contemptuous unbelief did Festus himself, when the Apostle preached repentance and the resurrection, exclaim, *Paul, thou art beside thyself, much learning doth make thee mad.†*

\* Acts xxv. 18.

† Acts xxvi. 24.

In censuring the obstinate unbelief, or the stupid self-delusion of these ignorant heathens, let us consider, how far the moral of their history is applicable to ourselves.

“Methinks if I could but once hear an Apostle reason of righteousness and temperance, and a judgment to come, I should not only tremble, like Felix, but feel my conscience stirred within me to a thorough repentance, and exclaim with an earnest anxiety, What shall I do to be saved? Yes,” the careless sinner may say, “to an Apostle indeed I could not do otherwise than listen with respect: the commission of the Spirit would carry with it so much weight of authority, that I should pay a serious attention to every thing which fell from his lips. But *your* preaching is only the advice of a man like myself; and I feel none of that alarm or edification, while listening to you, which an Apostle, or even an apostolical man, would inspire.”

Such is the reasoning, by which the hypocrite and the self-deceiver bring themselves to contemn the authority of those, who are appointed to reprove, rebuke, and exhort them: *Nay, but if one came unto us from the dead, we should repent.* My brethren, you have the words, if not the voice of an Apostle, in your Bibles, and



in the ministry of the Church. You have the preaching of the Lord Jesus himself. He reasons with you, in language too plain to be misunderstood, of righteousness, temperance, and judgment. But it is on that very account, because the language of the Gospel is alarmingly plain and uncompromising, that so many refuse to listen to it: they will not believe that law to be of divine authority, which proscribes so many opinions and practices, approved of and rewarded by the world. To general and indefinite commendations of virtue they can listen with complacency; and they assent to the truth, that sin is displeasing to God: but when the preacher applies himself directly to their consciences; fixes the Gospel prohibitions upon their own particular indulgences; enforces the necessity of personal holiness; and points out their individual danger; they tremble, perhaps; but their pride straitway rises; the fancied security of a determined, or careless, unbelief is contrasted with the fearful anxiety of a convinced, and self-condemned sinner; and the preacher is dismissed, and would be, even were he an apostle—*Go thy way.*

In the different discourses of St. Paul, before Felix and Agrippa, we have another instance of the discernment and prudence, with which he

accommodated his mode of reasoning to the intellectual, or moral peculiarities of his hearers. To Felix, a heathen in religion, and a profligate in practice, he argued, upon those principles of right and wrong, which even the heathens understood and acknowledged, for the duties of righteousness and temperance; and pointed out, from the marks of God's providential government, which were upon the face of nature and the surface of events, the high probability of a judgment to come: from thence he proceeded to declare its revealed certainty, and the necessity of repentance, *because God hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man, whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.* Such was the line of argument, which he pursued with the Athenians; and such no doubt was his mode of reasoning with Felix. But in his pleading before Agrippa, who was *expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews,\** he appeals both to the writings of the Old Testament, and to the received opinions and constant traditions of his nation; and argues for the credibility of the resurrection, from *the hope of the promise made*

\* Acts xxvi. 3.

of God to their fathers—saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come. This mode of reasoning was so strange to Festus, that he treated the Apostle as a madman: but Agrippa, to whom it was more immediately directed, felt its force, when he said, *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*

When Paul was in custody at Jerusalem, the Lord stood by him and said, *Be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.\** It is possible, that this intimation was present to the mind of the Apostle, when he appealed from the judgment of Festus to that of Cæsar; a necessary consequence of which appeal would be, the being sent to abide by it at Rome. No doubt he was influenced, in part, by the persuasion, that justice would not be done to him by Festus; whose interest it was, to gratify the Jews upon his coming into the province. As Felix, *willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, had left Paul bound;†* so it was to be apprehended, that Festus, from the same motive, would act towards the Apostle, as Pilate had acted towards a holier and a nobler victim,

\* Acts xxiii. 11.

† Acts xxiv. 27.

and *deliver him to their will.\** But the testimony of Agrippa, himself a Jew, to the innocence of Paul, compelled the Roman governor to acknowledge, *that he had done nothing worthy of death or bonds.* And *Agrippa said unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.* But that appeal had been providentially ordered by God; and we may discover a probable reason of that providential arrangement in the consideration, that if Paul had visited Rome of his own accord, a private and obscure individual, he would not have excited the same interest and attention, which were awakened by the circumstance of his being sent thither as an appellant to the tribunal of the emperor. This brought him immediately within the precincts of the court; and one result was, the conversion of some of the imperial household. He tells the Philippians, *that the things which happened unto him had fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel; so that his bonds in Christ were manifest in the palace, and in all other places.*

The limits of this discourse permit me to notice but very briefly the voyage of St. Paul to Rome;

\* Luke xxiii. 25.

and the remarkable illustration which it affords of a truth, which we must acknowledge and repose in, and yet are unable to comprehend; that the fixed purposes of God's providence are not so fixed, as to exclude the instrumentality of human means; but that the certainty of his decrees is consistent with what we consider to be a contingency. Paul had been assured in a vision, that there should be no loss of any man's life in the ship; and yet he prayed them to take most, and declared that unless all continued in the ship, none could be saved.\* An implicit reliance, therefore, upon the divine protection, does not exclude the diligent use of all probable means of ensuring our own safety.

The Jews at Rome received the doctrine of Paul, as their brethren had done elsewhere: *some believed the things that were spoken, and some, the greater part, as we collect from his rebuke, believed not.* The Apostle therefore turned to the Gentiles, amongst whom he was assured that the Gospel would find a readier reception. *And he dwelt at Rome two whole years, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.*

\* Acts xxvii. 22, 31.

During his residence there, he wrote four, if not five of his Epistles; in some of which he speaks of himself as *the prisoner of Jesus Christ*,\* and his *ambassador in bonds*.† At the end of two years he was set at liberty, and travelled to other countries, to plant the Church of Christ; not building on other men's foundations, but passing on from land to land, *to preach the Gospel in the regions beyond, and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to his hand*.‡ By some he has been supposed, but with very little probability, to have visited these islands. Whether he did so or not, is of small importance to us; but it is a consideration of infinite importance, (inasmuch as it lays upon us an awful responsibility,) that the same Gospel which Paul preached, has been preached to us; and that we possess, in the written monuments of its history, an amount and weight of evidence, which none of his immediate hearers enjoyed.

Let us take comfort from reviewing the wonderful manner, in which God put forth the energies of omnipotence, in mighty demonstration of the truth as it is in Jesus; and let us take warning from the example of these who

\* Ephes. iii. 1; Philem. i. 9. † Ephes. vi. 20.

‡ 2 Cor. x. 16.

despised and rejected that salvation, which was proposed to them with so much clearness of evidence, and so great importunity of kindness. *For, as the great Apostle has said, unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them; but the word preached did not profit them (nor will it profit, yea rather it will destroy us), not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.\* Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, which they despised, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.*

Let us pray to be blessed with such a freedom from pride, and false opinion, and corrupt inclination; with such a clearness of spiritual vision; such a longing after the kingdom of God and his righteousness; such a spirit of meekness and submission to his revealed will; that *through patience and comfort of the Scripture, we may have hope;† and be filled with all joy and peace in believing;‡ and remain stedfast and exemplary members of that Church, which is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.§*

\* Heb. iv. 2.

† Rom. xv. 4.

‡ Rom. xv. 13.

§ Ephes. ii. 20.

A  
COURSE OF LECTURES  
ON THE  
GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN,  
PREACHED IN THE  
PARISH CHURCH OF ST. BOTOLPH, BISHOPSGATE,  
IN LENT, 1823.



# REPORT

OF THE



## COMMISSION

ON

THE

THE

# LECTURES

ON

## THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN.

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### LECTURE I.

JOHN XX. 31.

*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through his name.*

**T**HERE is scarcely any part of the sacred Volume, especially of the New Testament, how often soever he may have read it, which will not, upon a careful re-perusal, furnish a Christian with new matter of instruction and reflexion. If those persons, who have leisure and ability for the pursuit, would frequently read the Gospel History, each time with a view to some particular point of inquiry, they would find their

labour amply repaid, by a clearer insight into the force and consistency of all its parts. For instance, I would at one time study the narratives of the Evangelists, with a view to the peculiar opinions which the Jews entertained concerning their expected Messiah. I would read them again, with reference to the personal character and conduct of our Saviour; at another time, for the purpose of comparing all the parables which speak of the kingdom of heaven; at another, with an eye to the fulfilment, or abrogation, of the Mosaic law; and lastly, with a particular attention to that important and capital feature of the Gospel dispensation, the office and nature of our blessed Saviour. In pursuing our inquiries on this head, we shall find our attention particularly drawn towards the Gospel of St. John; which tells us a great many things, about which the other Evangelists are silent, and takes but little notice of others, upon which they enlarge.

I have selected this Gospel for the subject of my Lectures during the present season of Lent, intending to consider it, not so much in a historical point of view, as with reference to the great and sublime doctrines which it inculcates, of the divine nature, and mediatorial office of

Jesus Christ. It was in allusion to these doctrines, that the Gospel of St. John was called by the ancient Christians, "the spiritual Gospel;" and to every mind, which is properly disposed to receive with humble thankfulness the revelation of the great mystery of godliness, or qualified to admire and reverence the unspeakable love, and piety, and condescension of the Redeemer, this Gospel is in the highest degree interesting and affecting. It is natural that it should be so. It was written by the disciple whom Jesus loved; whose head rested on his bosom; whom he vouchsafed to take with him as a witness of his transfiguration; and to whose care, upon his departure from the world, he commended his aged mother. No other disciple was likely to write with more warmth of affection, or a greater zeal for the honour of his Lord; or to give a more faithful transcript of the discourses of Him, who spake as never man spake.

The Gospel of St. John was written several years after those of the other Evangelists; and evidently with a different object. They relate the principal *incidents* of our Saviour's life; St. John is more diligent in recording his *discourses*. The other Evangelists enumerate a great variety of miracles; St. John describes

only a few of the most remarkable, which had a more immediate reference to the particular object of his Gospel. They repeat the discourses which Jesus held with the people, mostly in Galilee, in the form of parables and short moral sentences: John has preserved the longer and more argumentative conversations of our Saviour with the learned Jews, on the subject of the Messiah; and those in which he explained to his disciples the nature of his mission and office.

Now it is very plain, that whatever other objects St. John may have had in view, this was one,—to convey to the Christian world just and adequate notions of the real nature, character, and office of that great teacher, who came to instruct and redeem mankind. For this purpose, he studiously selected for his narrative those passages of our Saviour's life, which most clearly displayed his divine power and authority; and those of his discourses, in which he spoke most plainly of his own nature, and of the efficacy of his death, as an atonement for the sins of the world. The object, which this Evangelist had in view, is very clearly stated in the words of the text. It was not to accumulate as many instances as possible of the miraculous power

exercised by Jesus; but only those which most distinctly illustrated his peculiar office and nature: *Many other signs truly did Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through his name.* This expression seems to prove, that those persons are wrong, who suppose that St. John wrote his Gospel merely to supply the defects and omissions of the other Evangelists. The real difference between them is, that *they* wrote a history of our Saviour's life; but St. John, of his person and office.

Whoever, then, desires to form a just notion of the real office and dignity of the Saviour of the world, let him study the representations which Jesus has given of himself, in the discourses recorded by St. John. The Apostles speak of him in their Epistles, it is true, in noble and characteristic expressions: but *here* the Saviour speaks of himself, and in language which no ingenuity can pervert.

St. Matthew and St. Luke begin by relating the circumstances attending the birth of Jesus; and trace his genealogy from David, whose descendant the promised Messiah was to be. But

John introduces him at once in his divine character, as having existed before the world began, himself the Creator of the world. And having thus, in the very opening of his Gospel, announced the transcendent dignity of his subject, he takes occasion to inculcate the same truth throughout the whole of his subsequent history. With this notion of the scope and purpose of the Evangelist, his Gospel is clear, consistent, and intelligible; upon any other supposition, it is obscure and inexplicable.

*In the beginning*, says the Evangelist, *was the Word*. Whatever may have been the origin of this expression of the *Word*, it is quite evident that it means Jesus Christ; for in the following verses he is described in terms which leave no room for doubt. *In the beginning*, i. e. in the beginning of time; from all eternity. Here, then, is asserted the eternal pre-existence of Jesus Christ. On what authority does St. John assert it? On the express testimony of our Lord himself; who in his prayer to the Father, said, *And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world began*.\* These words abundantly refute the interpretation which the Unitarians would

\* John xvii. 5.

put upon the first words of the Gospel, who say that *in the beginning* means simply, "from the commencement of Christ's ministry;" so that John is made to say this; 'Christ was, or existed, in the commencement of his ministry:' a strangely unmeaning sentence! But no unprejudiced person can doubt, that the Evangelist follows the historian of the creation; that as Moses declares, *IN THE BEGINNING God created the heaven and the earth*; so John uses the phrase in the same, or in a still higher sense. Agreeably to this St. Paul tells us, that God *hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world.*\* In the next place, as a question might probably be asked, Where was the Christ in this state of pre-existence? the Evangelist adds, *And the Word was with God*; agreeably to the declaration of our Lord above mentioned, *glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world began.* And again, *I came down from heaven to do the will of Him that sent me, via God.*

But according to St. John, not only was the Word *with* God, but the Word *was* God. So direct and irrefragable is this testimony to the divine nature of Jesus Christ, that the Unitarians

\* Ephes. i. 4.



are driven to the most unreasonable methods of interpretation; and some of them to a still bolder measure than misinterpretation, that of rejecting the whole Gospel, as not having been written by St. John.

We need not dwell at length upon this point; for the words which next follow are so precise, that they seem to have been employed by St. John for the express purpose of excluding all equivocation. *All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.* This passage the Unitarians translate, "all things were done by him, and without him was not any thing done that was done." But *we*, I think, may be very well content to understand it as an Apostle has done; who, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, declares expressly, that *God made the worlds by his Son.\** The same writer says, *through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God.†* From these two passages it is clear, that the *Word* of God is

\* Heb. i. 2.

† Heb. xi. 3. Compare Col. i. 16. *By HIM were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible. He is before all things, and by Him all things consist.* The Unitarians would explain this to mean, "that all things were done by Christ which relate to the Christian dispensation!"

the *Son* of God; that by him all things were created; and that the Unitarian interpretation is unfounded.

But since an opinion might be entertained by some, that Christ was only the instrument of creation, in the hands of his Almighty Father, himself having been created, the Apostle shuts out that supposition by saying, that *without him was not any thing made that was made*. If so, Christ himself was uncreate; and therefore self-existent. This assertion destroys what is called the Arian scheme, according to which the divine Word was the first and highest of created beings. St. John declares that the Word was no creature; no, not even of the highest conceivable rank and order; nor created at the remotest point of time. But how are we to reconcile this with St. Paul's expression in his Epistle to the Colossians, where he says of the Son; *Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature?*\* We answer thus; The original word either implies that inconceivable generation, by which the Son came from the Father from all eternity, as in Heb. i. 6, *When he bringeth the first-begotten* [or first-born] *into the world*; or it may mean, for it will bear the sense, *the first producer of*

\* Coloss. i. 15.

the whole creation ; and this interpretation seems to be rendered probable by the words which immediately follow, *For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers. All things were created by him, and for him ; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.*

St. John then proceeds to state, that the Divine Word created all things, as possessing in himself the power of giving life : *In him was life.* Our Saviour says of himself, in the fifth chapter ; *The Son quickeneth, or giveth life, to whom he will.—As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself ;* and he is there contrasting life with actual corporal death. The Evangelist then, who remembered our Lord's expressions, must have intended here the power of communicating life, properly so called ; and not merely, as the Unitarians pretend, “ the words of eternal life.”

*And the life,* says St. John, *was the light of men.* This divine Being, who was the source and giver of life to the things of creation, was also the fountain of spiritual light to mankind : being sent by the Father to enlighten their understandings

with the knowledge of true religion. Here again the Apostle adopts the language of his divine Master, who said of himself, *I am the light of the world*;\* and in a lower sense he declared to his Apostles, *Ye are the light of the world*. He himself was pre-eminently *the light of men*; for he was that *Sun of righteousness that arose with healing in his wings*; † the great *Light* which was seen by *the people that walked in darkness, and in the land of the shadow of death*; ‡ Perhaps also the term “light” implies *blessing*: a metaphor frequent in Jewish writers. The almighty Author of good is called by St. James, *the Father of lights*. § Jesus Christ is indeed the light of men; not merely as the great instructor of mankind in the precepts of his Gospel, but as holding out the glories of his kingdom to all true believers, and illuminating with his Spirit the pious heart, and diffusing through the soul the light and warmth of his grace. He is a light to us in his word, his sacraments, his ordinances; a light, which none of the changes of life’s uncertain day can extinguish or overcast; and which to the faithful Christian shines brighter and brighter, as the

\* John viii. 12.

† Mal. iv. 2.

‡ Is. ix. 2.

§ James i. 17.

shades of evening gather round his declining years.

The use of light is, to disperse the darkness : but the light which shone upon the darkness of men's sinful state, in too many instances shone in vain. Those who were blinded by sinful indulgence, or pride, would not take advantage of it : they did not even perceive that it was the light. Both Jews and Gentiles, with comparatively few exceptions, were in this condition : for how very small, when compared with the great mass of mankind, was the number of those who had professed a belief in Jesus Christ at the time when St. John wrote ! Christ crucified was *to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness* :\* and so the *light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not*. I fear that even at the present day this description is too extensively verified. Of those, upon whom the light of the Gospel has shined, some reject it, and shut their eyes against it altogether ; some profess to receive it, yet seem not to comprehend it, either as to the degree in which it was intended to illuminate them, or as to the proportion, which must always exist, between the clearness of our

\* 1 Cor. i. 23.

knowledge and the strictness of our duty. Let us be careful not to be such as we should have been, had we been born in the darkness of heathen ignorance and idolatry: *let us walk as children of light*;\* ever bearing in mind, that the light which shines upon us, deepens all the shades of our moral character; that the more we know, the more sinful are our defects of practice. Let us also beware of perverting the light, which God has vouchsafed to us in the revelation of his word, to sanction our own erroneous notions or principles; and take good heed, *that the light which is in us be not darkness*.†

Nothing can be more complete, and at the same time more concise, than the attestation, borne by the Evangelist in this preface, to the divine nature of the Messiah. He was in the beginning; existent from all eternity. He was with God, and so distinguished from him in person, and yet *he was God*. And he did not *begin* to be with God, as some have supposed, at a certain definite period of time, before which he was not; but he was *in the beginning with God*, as he declares of himself in the Revelations, *I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end; the first and the last*. Nor was he a created,

\* Ephes. v. 8.

† Luke xi. 35.

and consequently a finite being; but *all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.* He contained within himself the principle of universal life and existence; *in him was life*:—men and angels, as well as the humbler tribes of animated beings, received the breath of life from him; and *He was the light of men*, restoring them to the knowledge and favour of God.

After this brief, but sublime description of the Word, the Evangelist proceeds to tell his readers, that it was not John the Baptist, (as some perhaps might think,) of whom he was speaking; who was held in such high estimation by the Jews, that many supposed him to be one of the old prophets returned to life, and some even thought him to be the Messiah himself. And therefore St. John, having mentioned the Baptist, as a *man sent from God*, adds, that he was so sent, not to be himself the Messiah, the Word, the Light; but to bear witness of the light, and to prepare men's minds for its reception. *That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.\** During

\* The original words may be rendered, *that was the true light, which, coming into the world, enlighteneth every man.* And this seems to have a natural coherence with the follow-

the residence of the incarnate Word upon earth, few indeed knew him to be the true light, or at least were aware of his real nature and office. And although he came, in the first instance, to that peculiar people, who had been set apart for the purpose of keeping alive the promise of his advent, and to whom that promise more immediately pertained, yet he encountered an ungracious reception. They refused to acknowledge him as the promised Messiah; *He came to his own,† and his own received him not.* Some few, however, there were, who did receive him in that capacity, convinced, as well by the doctrines which he preached, as by the wonderful works which he performed. These he made the first partakers in that great regeneration, which he came to effect, of making all mankind children of God, instead of children of wrath: *i. e.* of imparting to them a capacity of obtaining the favour and forgiveness of their heavenly Father; a change from their former spiritual condition

ing words, *He was in the world.* So in iii. 19. *And this is the condemnation, THAT LIGHT IS COME INTO THE WORLD, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.* It does not, however, seem to be material which version we adopt.

† The original word may signify *his own house.*



so complete and effectual, that *He* might justly be said to have *begotten them unto a lively hope\** of the inheritance, and they, to have undergone a regeneration, or new birth. This is the meaning of St. John in the twelfth and thirteenth verses: *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God; even to them that believe on his name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Observe the condition of this regeneration—*to them that believe on his name.* As the Evangelist does not explain the meaning of this expression, we must of course understand the belief, which he speaks of, to be a belief in Christ, as he has just been described; viz. as the Eternal Word; the creator of the world; the light of men; the source of life. If we have any doubt on this subject, it will be removed by the express words of St. John in the text, as to the essential point of Christian belief: *These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through his name.*

\* 1 Pet. i. 3.

Finally, having given this brief but forcible description of the divine nature of the Word, of his power, and efficacy; the Evangelist, in order to obviate any notion of the communication of power from God to the man Jesus, and to meet the objection of the Jews, who denied that the Messiah had come in the flesh, says, that *the Word was made flesh, (i. e. a human person) and dwelt amongst us; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.\** John himself beheld the glory of Christ, when he was transfigured, and declared by a voice from heaven to be the beloved Son of God. St. Peter, who was also present on that occasion, says, *we were eye-witnesses of his majesty.†* This glory of the Word was not only that which resulted from his display of supernatural power; but also a visible personal glory; such a glory, according to the Evangelist, as may well be supposed to distinguish the only-begotten Son of God; his Son, not in the sense in which other holy men have been honoured with that title; but the Son of God, by a mode of generation peculiar to himself; his *only-begotten Son*. The words, *full of grace and truth*, refer

\* 1 John iv. 1.

† 2 Pet. i. 16.

to the first part of the sentence, which will appear plainer, if it be read thus : *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth ; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father.*

From this explanation of the first chapter of St. John, it appears, that his chief object, in writing it, was to assert the divinity of the Eternal Word : and the same object, as we shall hereafter see, displays itself throughout the whole of this Gospel.

If men would be content to receive, with simplicity and seriousness of intention, such information respecting the dispensations of God, as God himself has been pleased to give, and in the form in which He has given it, this purpose of the Evangelist would be so obvious, as to need no illustration. But since those persons, who reject all such parts of revelation as are above their own comprehension, have endeavoured to explain away the force and meaning of the testimony, which this great Evangelist has borne to the divinity of Christ ; we shall not be unprofitably employed, in placing that testimony in a clear and comprehensive point of view. It will serve, if not to exalt our own notions of the Redeemer's person

and office, yet to strengthen and enliven our faith; and to confirm us in the comfortable assurance, that Jesus is indeed *the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

## LECTURE II.

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JOHN i. 18.

*No man hath seen God at any time. The only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.*

IN the fourteenth verse of this chapter the Evangelist declares, that he and his fellow-disciples had beholden the glory of the incarnate Word, *as of the only-begotten of the Father*; and here he terms him *the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father*. Is it to be believed, that St. John would have repeated and enforced so remarkable an expression, if he had not wished to convey to his readers a notion, that Christ was the Son of God, in a sense entirely different from, and superior to that, in which the angels, and prophets, and holy men of old, were called sons of God? Christians are confessedly the children of God by adoption and grace; which is more than can be said of any

man under the old covenant; yet how different is the language in which the Evangelist speaks of *them*, from that in which he describes our Saviour! *To as many as received him, gave he power to become sons (or children) of God.* But Christ is called the *only-begotten Son*; i. e. the Son, by a mode of generation peculiar to himself; and therefore not in the same manner in which any other being whatever could be called the Son of God. The Unitarians indeed pretend, that the word, as used by St. John, means nothing more than *dearly beloved*: but even if we admit this interpretation to be true (which, however, has been again and again refuted\*), still it implies the highest possible degree of affection, such as a father feels towards his only son: and even in this case we shall be compelled to acknowledge, that Christ is *the object of a peculiar and unparalleled divine love*,† and is the Son of God in a sense exclusively belonging to himself.

*No man*, says the Evangelist, *hath seen God at any time*, i. e. hath had a perfect compre-

\* See "A Vindication of the First Two Chapters of St. Matthew and St. Luke, by a Layman," p. 228.

† See Dr. John Pye Smith's Scripture Testimony to the Messiah, vol. ii. p. 533.

hension of his nature and attributes. We may conjecture his power, and wisdom, and goodness, from the works of creation: but to *know* him, to have a certain acquaintance with divine things, and especially with the secrets of his moral government of the world, is what no man can boast of. Yet this knowledge, to such an extent, as is proportioned to the faculties of the human mind, has been revealed to us by the Son of God, who was always,\* to use an image expressive of perfect familiarity, in the bosom of his Father; and knew his most intimate counsels; and was therefore able to impart to us that enlarged and just knowledge of God, which neither Moses, nor any of the prophets possessed. Is it credible, that the Evangelist could have said of a mere man, that he was *in the bosom of God the Father*? Surely such an expression would be little short of impious. Let us put the following case to a Unitarian, who maintains that the simple humanity of Jesus Christ is the

\* The original words should probably be translated, *who was in the bosom of the Father*. So in iii. 13, *No man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven, rather, which was in heaven*. The original in both instances is the present participle *being*. This is the interpretation of the best commentators.

plain undeniable doctrine of the New Testament:

Suppose that the Gospel had been recently published to the world; and that a diversity of opinions had begun to prevail amongst those who had embraced it, relating to the person and office of Jesus Christ. His favourite disciple, who must naturally be desirous that correct notions should be entertained upon this point, knowing that men's opinions are divided, applies himself to record certain incidents of his Master's life, and certain of his discourses, which may throw some light upon the points in dispute. If he is convinced that Jesus, although an inspired prophet, was no more than a man, he will take care to avoid all ambiguous expressions, which may be construed into an assertion of his divinity.

Now St. John was precisely in that predicament; he knew that erroneous opinions were abroad concerning the nature of Christ; for he says in his first Epistle, *Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.\** Yet how does he begin his account of Jesus Christ? Does he speak of him as a highly

\* 1 John ii. 22.



gifted and divinely commissioned man? No; he seems to take all possible care to exclude the supposition. He says of John the Baptist (whom our Lord pronounced to be *more than a prophet*), that he *was a man sent from God*; but of Christ he declares, in unqualified terms, that he was in the beginning; that he was with God; that he was the only-begotten Son; in the bosom of the Father; that he was God; that he was the Creator of all things, himself uncreate; that he is the source of life, and the light of men; that he was made flesh (which implies that he had borne a spiritual nature before); and that John the Baptist, although older than Jesus, declared that Jesus was preferred before him, *for he was before him*;\* i. e. existed before him: an expression which would be well understood by the Jews, who entertained a notion of the pre-existence of their expected Messiah.† Would

\* The Unitarian Version says, "for he is my principal." It would hardly edify the class of readers for whom these Lectures are intended, if I were to enter upon a verbal criticism, and show, as others have done before, that this interpretation is wholly unjustifiable.

† The following expression occurs in an ancient Jewish commentary on Gen. xlix. 2. "It is written (Gen. i. 2.) *The Spirit of God brooded on the waters.* That Spirit is the Spirit of Messiah the King."

an Evangelist, entertaining the opinions which the Unitarians of the present day profess, have opened his Gospel with a series of expressions, so strongly declaratory of the divine nature of Christ, that in order to avoid the force of them, we must call in the aid of allegory of the harshest and most unusual kind? Surely it is not possible to read the first verses of St. John, taking for our guides the acknowledged and usual rules of interpretation, without perceiving the irresistible evidence which they afford to the grand doctrine of our Lord's divinity.

Let us now consider the testimony borne by John the Baptist. After having professed himself not worthy to unloose the shoe-latchet of that great Unknown, who, coming after him, was preferred before him; the next day, seeing Jesus coming unto him, he saith, *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world.* "Afterwards, when Jesus was baptizing the Jews by his disciples, and many resorted to him, the disciples of John, jealous of the honour of their master, complained to him that Jesus drew away the people to himself, and took upon him the office of baptizing them. Upon this John, with great sincerity and modesty, declared how much he was inferior to Christ: He reminded

them how often he had said that he was not the Messiah, but his forerunner; he told them that his office would soon expire, and that Christ, who then began to appear, should obscure his glory; which was to him a cause of joy, not of envy; he told them that Christ was the beloved Son of God, sent by him, and received from him the Holy Spirit without measure, to reside upon him at all times, and to direct him in all things; that therefore whosoever believed in him should have everlasting life, and whoever rejected him, should not see life, but the wrath of God should abide upon him.\*

All this is stated in the latter part of the third chapter; where the Baptist expressly distinguishes between men, who are of the earth, earthly, and Christ, *who cometh from heaven, and is above all*; as St. Paul afterwards expressed it, *the first man is of the earth, earthy, the second man is the Lord from heaven.*† What interpretation does common sense require us to put upon these words? We have the forerunner of our Lord, and his Apostle, and our Lord himself, in his conference with Nicodemus, concurring in the same plain, intelligible assertion, that the Christ, whether spoken

\* Jortin on the Christian Religion, p. 182.

† I Cor. xv. 47.

of as Son of God, or Son of Man, came down from heaven. Yet the Unitarians would persuade us, that "coming from heaven" means nothing more than receiving a divine commission. But how is this interpretation to be reconciled with the 51st verse of the sixth chapter, where our Saviour says, *I am the living bread which came down from heaven?* The Jews understood those words of a literal descent from heaven:\* and when some of his disciples were offended at that notion, he said, *Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up, WHERE HE WAS BEFORE?*†

John the Baptist calls our Saviour, *the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.* The persons to whom he spoke were Jews: in what sense would they *naturally* understand him? If we can resolve this question, we shall ascertain the real meaning of the Baptist's words. They could hardly have comprehended the appellation of the Lamb of God, except as referring to the lamb, which was sacrificed in the rite of purification, or to that passage of Isaiah, with which the Jews were familiar, in which it is said of the Messiah, *the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all—he is brought as a lamb to the*

\* John vi. 42.

† See Lect. IV.

*slaughter*.\* In either case, the comparison involved the idea of a violent death; and that death was connected, by the following words, with a liberation from sin, that is, from the punishment of sin.

Some indeed have contended, that the Baptist employed this image, merely to denote the purity of Christ's character; and that 'taking away the sin of the world' means simply the reformation of manners which he was to effect. But if we attend to the analogy of scripture, we must explain this passage of a sacrificial atonement for sin, to be made by the death of Christ; for St. Peter tells his readers, that they *were redeemed—with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*;† an image which is very prominent in the Revelations. We may remark, by the way, that our Saviour is here described as bearing, or taking away *the sin of the world*. So in his first Epistle, St. John says, that *if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world*.‡ from which passage it is plain, that the plan of divine mercy is not limited to a certain

\* Isaiah liii. 6.

† 1 Pet. i. 19.

‡ 1 John ii. 2.

number of chosen individuals. Lastly, although John, under the guidance of the Spirit, designated Jesus as one who was to be slain, with the approbation of God; and who was to take upon himself the sin of the world, it does not follow that John himself, much less those who heard him, entertained a just and adequate notion of the manner in which this was to be effected.

“ Thus then is John the Baptist a witness of Christ, his office and dignity; he calls Christ the Son of God, and the Redeemer of the world; he affirms that he had a being before he appeared on the earth; that he came from God to teach men the way to obtain eternal life; he asserts that he saw the Spirit descend upon him, and heard the voice from heaven which declared him to be the Son of God.”\*

One remarkable circumstance here demands our notice. The Baptist speaks of *the Son of God*, without giving any explanation of the term. It must then have been familiar to the Jews, as a title of their expected Messiah. In like manner we find the terms *Son of Man*, and *Son of David*, used of the Messiah, without explanation, because they were current amongst the Jews, as scriptural designations of the great

\* Jortin, p. 183.

deliverer. So also *the kingdom of heaven* was a phrase in common use amongst them, to denote the dominion which the Messiah was to establish upon earth.

The testimony, borne by John the Baptist, to the superior dignity and authority of Jesus, induced two of his disciples to follow this new teacher; and after having passed some hours in conversation with him, one of them said to his brother, Simon, *We have found the Messias*. The day following, Philip, who had been called by Jesus, said to Nathanael, *We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph*. Nathanael, struck by the supernatural knowledge which Jesus displayed at their first interview, exclaimed, *Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel, i. e. thou art the expected Messiah*. We must not interpret this declaration too strictly, as implying that Nathanael possessed a just or adequate belief of the divine nature of Christ. The conceptions which the Jews at that time entertained on the subject of their Messiah, were in some respects gross and earthly; but the appellation of Son of God, thus applied, surely indicated a belief that Jesus was something more than a mere man. The time was not yet

come for a fuller revelation of the great mystery of godliness; but our Saviour said to the pious Israelite, *Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these.—Verily, verily I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.* That is, ye shall see many wonderful instances of the intimate connexion and communication between my heavenly Father and myself; many singular displays of divine power exerted in attestation of my Messiahship. So in Psalm xci. 11, the angels of God are represented as entrusted with the guardianship of righteous men: *He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways; they shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone;* and in Psalm xxxiv. 7, *The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him; and delivereth them.*

Within a few days after this promise had been made, it began to receive its fulfilment, in the first miracle which Jesus wrought, in Cana of Galilee; by which, says the Evangelist, *he manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.* He exhibited the most convincing



proofs of his divine power; and his followers were now confirmed in their faith.

Shortly afterwards occurred that remarkable transaction, which was repeated towards the conclusion of his ministry, the expulsion of the money-changers, and of those who sold animals for the uses of the worshippers, from the outer court of the temple. We need not pause here to consider the intent of that unusual exercise of authority on the part of our Saviour; but I wish to direct your attention to the words which he used on that occasion: *Take these things hence: make not my Father's house a house of merchandize.* So, when his parents found him at Jerusalem, disputing with the doctors in the temple, he said, *Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?* or, as the words should probably be rendered, *that I must be in my Father's house?* Surely this would be a strange and presumptuous mode of speech to be used by a mere man. Had Jesus been no more than a creature, although inspired, he would rather, one would think, have said, *Make not your heavenly Father's house a house of merchandize;* agreeably to his mode of expression, when he alluded to the relation in which his disciples stood to God; *your Father which is in heaven.*

But to this question we shall have occasion to revert hereafter. At present let us attend to his answer to the Jews, when they required a sign of him, in attestation of his authority, *Destroy this temple, (i. e. his body) and in three days I will raise it up:*\* that is, my resurrection from the dead, on the third day after you shall have put me to death, shall be an evident and convincing proof of my divine mission. But in what manner, and by whose power, was this miracle to be effected? undoubtedly by the power of God; and yet our Lord says, *I will raise it up*; an apparent discrepancy, which cannot well be reconciled, but by concluding that the Father and the Son are one. *As the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.*† “He, then, which quickeneth the dead bodies of others, when he raiseth them, he also quickened his own body when he raised that.‡” Again, our Lord declared, *I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.*§ “If Christ had done no more in the Resurrection than lifting up his own body when it was revived,”

\* John xi. 19.

† John v. 21.

‡ Bp. Pearson on the Creed, Art. V.

§ John x. 17.

(which is the interpretation put by some Unitarians upon our Saviour's expression of *raising up his own body*,) "he had done that which any other person might have done, and so had not declared himself to be the Son of God with power." It remaineth, therefore, "that Christ, by that power which he had within himself, did take his life again which he had laid down, did re-unite his soul unto his body, from which he separated it when he gave up the ghost; and so did quicken and revive himself: and so it is a certain truth, not only that God the Father raised the Son, but also that God the Son raised himself."\*

If it be said, that Jesus, when he spoke of doing, as of his own authority, the most wonderful miracles, intended only to assert the power which he had received from God, for the purpose of attesting his mission; we reply, that no man, who was conscious of deriving all his authority and power from God, could with propriety have used such unqualified language in describing his own exercise of that power. We do not find that the Apostles, when they wrought many wonderful works by the power which was vested in them, spoke of them as their own acts; but,

\* Bp. Pearson on the Creed, Art. V.

on the contrary, they expressly disclaimed all share in them, except as far as God had been pleased to make them the instruments of his goodness. When Peter had excited the astonishment of the people by restoring the lame man in the temple, he addressed them thus : *Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? the faith which is by him (Jesus) hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.\** If now, as the Unitarians say, power was communicated to Christ, as it was afterwards to the Apostles; how can we account for the fact, that our Lord always spoke of performing miracles on his own authority, and by virtue of his intrinsic power, while the Apostles studiously avoided all appearance of claiming such a power, and represented themselves as mere instruments in the hands of God?†

In the conclusion of the second chapter it is stated, that although many believed in the name of Jesus (*i. e.* believed him to be the Messiah) in consequence of the miracles which he performed

\* Acts iii. 12, 16.

† Add to this, that the Apostles worked their miracles in the name of Jesus.

at Jerusalem during the Passover, *he did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man.* And he perceived, no doubt, that of those who professed to believe in him, many entertained an imperfect or unreasonable faith, which would be shaken by the hardships of their profession, or by the difficulties of the Gospel revelation; which did in fact happen, when our Saviour discoursed to them of the living bread which came down from heaven: *from that time, says St. John, many of his disciples went back and walked with him no more.\** He knew the force of prejudice, and the pride of human reason, to be so great, as often to prevent men from believing that which they cannot fully comprehend; he foresaw that many would reject their Saviour, because he came to them in appearance different from what they had expected; and because he asserted claims, which they could not reconcile with their own notions. The same will ever be the case, as long as men set up their own reason for a perfect and paramount guide in matters of religion; instead of receiving, with humility and thankfulness, the revelation which

\* John vi. 66.

God is pleased to make of himself, and waiting for a more perfect knowledge of him, till the time when we shall see him face to face, and *know him even as we also are known.\**

\* 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

## LECTURE III.

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JOHN iii. 13.

*No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven.*

ONE of the most striking passages in St. John's Gospel is our Saviour's conference with Nicodemus. He appears to have been a timid, but well meaning man, who was convinced that Jesus was a divinely commissioned teacher; and therefore came to him by night, for the purpose of proposing to him some questions concerning the Messiah's nature and office; a subject which then occupied the attention of the religious Jews. I am not about to dwell upon that conversation, except as far as it touches upon the great question which these Lectures are intended to illustrate: but I cannot avoid remarking, by the way, that our Saviour's declaration of the necessity of an entire change in the state of man, to be wrought

by the outward sign of water, and the inward operation of the Spirit, is so positive and general, that it seems very presumptuous and unsafe, to separate the two, and to question the necessity of either part of the regenerating process. A certain sect denies that the ordinance of baptism was intended to be perpetual. But our Saviour's words contain no limitation; nor was the commission of baptism, which he gave to his Apostles, restricted by any definition of time. We are *at least* on the safe side, in retaining an expressive rite, appointed by our Lord, which his words appear positively to enjoin upon us, and which we know was considered to be necessary not only by the Apostles, but by their successors through a great many ages.

I proceed now to consider the words of my text; *No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven.* As Jesus had not yet ascended up to heaven, we must understand this phrase to mean the perfect knowledge which he possessed of the counsels of his heavenly Father. But here the Unitarian turns round upon us, and says, If you interpret the phrase of *ascending up to heaven* in a figurative sense, so also must you interpret the expression *coming down from heaven*,



to mean, simply, the communicating of this heavenly knowledge to mankind. . . . To which we reply, that if *coming down from heaven* be a metaphor, it must have a meaning precisely the opposite of that which belongs to the counter metaphor of *ascending up into heaven*; and in that case, if the latter figure means, *obtaining a perfect knowledge of the divine counsels*, the former must signify the losing of such knowledge, or the non-possession of it. And what sort of sense will this give? Although it is a very obvious and easy figure to say, that a man, who acquires a supernatural knowledge of divine things, *ascends up to heaven*, I cannot see with what propriety, or force, he, who imparts divine knowledge to others, can be said *to come down from heaven*. The knowledge itself may be said to come down from heaven, but not the man who possesses or imparts it. But according to *our* interpretation, the passage bears a very easy and natural sense; *No man hath enjoyed the opportunity of acquiring an intimate and perfect knowledge of the counsels of God, but he who came down from heaven; even the Son of Man, who was in heaven*; (for so the original words may be rendered.\*) Compare this passage with the 18th

\* See Note in p. 270.

verse of the first chapter, which I considered in my second Lecture, and you will see how the one explains and enforces the other. Our Lord declares, in express terms, of himself, what John the Baptist had before asserted of him, that he had been in heaven, and that he came down from heaven; a declaration which no earthly man, whatever degree of authority or inspiration he might have possessed, would have presumed to make.

The sum and substance of the information, which our Lord gave to Nicodemus, touching the Messiah, was this: That the Messiah was the Son of God; his only-begotten Son; not merely a teacher sent from God, which Nicodemus had acknowledged Jesus to be: that he was to undergo death; contrary to the prevailing opinion of the Jews, who expected that the Messiah would never die. The particular mode of death which he was to suffer, our Lord did not think fit to disclose, otherwise than by a similitude; but a very strong and pertinent similitude; that, as the brazen serpent was raised up by Moses, in order that the children of Israel, at the sight of it, might be cured of bodily disease; so the Messiah was to be lifted up; that by a stedfast looking to, and firm belief in him, so lifted up, all

men might be healed of the spiritual disease of sin—that *whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life*. No words could more pointedly express the efficacy of the death of Christ. He is lifted up,\* or crucified; *in order that* whosoever believeth in him, may have eternal life. Now surely men might have believed, (and many *did* believe) that Jesus was the Messiah, a prophet sent from God, without his being crucified; and indeed our Saviour does not say that he was to be crucified, that men might believe in him, but in order that those who *did* believe in him, might be saved. It is then a plain and necessary inference, that the death of Christ was the indispensable condition of man's salvation; and that the belief, required of Christians, is a belief in the efficacy of that death.

It is added, *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life—gave, i. e. gave up to death; as in Luke xxii. 19, This is my body which is given for you*. But as God is here said to have

\* So viii. 28, *When ye have LIFTED UP the Son of Man—* xii. 32. *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me*. This, adds the Evangelist, *he said, signifying what death he should die*.

given his only-begotten Son, so it is said of Christ, by St. Paul, that he *gave himself for our sins*.\* In the same sense he is said to have been given up, or *delivered for our offences*.†

In this declaration then of our blessed Lord, are clearly stated the effects of his death upon the cross; it liberated mankind from the penalty of eternal death, and procured to them the capacity of eternal life. And this is a fundamental doctrine of the Gospel, which we should cherish, as we value our religious steadfastness in this world, or our hope in another. The atonement made for our sins by the sacrifice of the incarnate Word, is the distinguishing and consolatory feature of his religion. Upon our faith in that, depends our capacity of receiving divine grace through him. If Jesus was no more than man, his death upon the cross had no more virtue, nor efficacy, than the death of any other holy man, who at any time has died in defence of the truth: it was an attestation of his own sincerity and rectitude of intention; but it could have no influence upon the condition of other men's souls, with respect to the punishment due to sin; for, as the Psalmist says, *None of them can by any means redeem his brother,*

\* Gal. i. 4.

† Rom. iv. 25.

*nor give to God a ransom for him: for the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth (or is let alone) for ever.\** Deny the exalted nature of the Redeemer; reduce him to the common level of the human race; and the Atonement is done away: He is no longer *the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world*: He is no longer that Saviour, who *gave his life a ransom for many,†* and for us amongst the rest: the comfortable assurance of a propitiation made for our sins, which we have clung to as *an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast,‡* is withdrawn from us; and we are left under the penalty due to those, who are commanded to fulfil the law of righteousness, but are incapacitated by their nature from doing so; and who have no means whatever of making even the slightest amends for their deficiencies. The Scriptures of the New Testament become confused and obscure; the declarations of our Lord and his Apostles inconsistent with one another; the dignity of the Gospel dispensation lowered, the beauty of its holiness defaced. Oh, let us beware of falling under that fearful denunciation of the Apostle; *Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall HE be thought worthy, who*

\* Ps. xlix. 7.

† Matt. xx. 28.

‡ Heb. vi. 19.

*hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the spirit of Grace?\**

Our Saviour declares, in the 18th verse of the third chapter, that *he that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God: that is, because he hath not believed him to be that, which he professed to be, the only-begotten Son of God.* Surely this indicates very clearly the object of a Christian's faith; the only-begotten Son of God, made flesh, and crucified for our sins; and *set forth to be a propitiation THROUGH FAITH IN HIS BLOOD.†*

Having already considered the testimony of John the Baptist recorded in the latter part of the third chapter, I will only recall your attention to the marked manner, in which he contrasts the nature of the Messiah with his own; *He that cometh from above, is above all; he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth; he that cometh from heaven is above all, and what he hath seen and heard, he testifieth.* Here are three points of difference. The Baptist says

\* Heb. x. 29.

† Rom. iii. 25.

of himself, that he is of the earth; that he is consequently earthly in his nature; and that, as to his doctrine, he speaketh earthly things: in each of these particulars he marks a contrast in the person of the Christ; *he* is from above, of heaven; he is consequently superior to all, in nature heavenly; and he testifieth what he hath seen and heard; *i. e.* in heaven. The parallel is thus perfect, and the contrast complete.

I will only add one remark: how strange it is, that, while John the Baptist, who did not live to see the consummation of the divine plan of mercy, spoke in such magnificent language of the exalted nature of the Redeemer, Christians, who have before them the still stronger declarations of our Lord and his Apostles, should attempt to degrade the dignity of his person, and to disparage the worthiness of the sacrifice which he offered for the sins of the world.

In the fourth chapter is related our Saviour's conversation with the woman of Samaria. From her words, *I know that Messiah cometh,*\* it appears that the Samaritans, as well as the Jews, were looking for the advent of the Christ; and if we may judge from the woman's expression, *when he is come he will tell us all*

\* John iv. 25.

*things*, their notions of the Messiah's office were far more correct than those which were held by the Scribes and Pharisees. Afterwards, when the Samaritans, amongst whom our Saviour abode two days, had heard his preaching, they said to the woman, *Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.\** The despised and detested Samaritans, uncorrupted by vain traditions, and selfish expectations, recognised at once the great teacher and redeemer of the world: while the Jews, who fancied themselves possessed of the key of divine knowledge, and masters of every circumstance relating to their own Messiah, as they considered him, rejected and reviled the meek and holy Jesus, calumniated his miracles, and despised his preaching.

In return for the honest readiness of the Samaritans, Jesus told them in plain, unequivocal language, that he was indeed the Messiah: he accepted from them the title of the Saviour of the world; and the whole transaction is recorded by St. John, with a view to his main object, that of proving, from the discourses of Jesus, the superior dignity of his nature. Let us make, by

\* John iv. 42.



the way, one reflexion upon this incident in our Saviour's ministry; that divine knowledge is most readily and abundantly communicated to those minds, which are least possessed by prejudice, or by an opinion of superior wisdom.

In the fifth chapter is related the cure of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda. When the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to slay him because he had done this thing on the sabbath-day, Jesus answered them, *My Father worketh hitherto, and I work;*\* that is, my Father exercises his power and providence continually, without the intervention of rest; in like manner, I perform divine works when I please. This was a plain assumption of divine authority; and so his hearers understood it: *therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.*† You will remark, that the Evangelist does not say, that the Jews *supposed* Jesus to have said this, or that they misunderstood him; but that they were incensed, because he actually did make himself equal with God.

One thing is certain, that the Jews understood the phrase of *the Son of God* to imply

\* John v. 17.

† John v. 18.

an immediate connexion with the Father, of a peculiar and sublime nature. And if they had been mistaken in that notion, Jesus would surely either have forbore from applying it to himself upon all occasions, or have given some explanation of it. But what is the real state of the case? Instead of disclaiming that equality with God, which the Jews understood him to assert, he enforces it, and enters into particular instances: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.\**

The Son then has equal power with the Father; but it cannot be that the Father and the Son should be opposed to, or differing from each other, in the exercise of their power; because their will, as well as their power, is identical: *For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth.†* The word "sheweth" evidently means a communication, not only of knowledge, but of power,—*And he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel, i. e.* in such a degree as to excite the astonishment and admiration of men. These greater manifestations of divine authority and

\* John v. 19.

† John v. 20.

power our Saviour then proceeds to specify, namely, the raising of the dead to life, and the final judgment of mankind; which he declares to be committed to him by the Father, and yet to belong to him, by virtue of his own power. *For as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.\** Let me ask, would any man of common understanding, who has no preconceived opinions upon disputed points of theology, put any other interpretation upon these words, than that which lies on the surface, that the Son is to be believed in, and loved, and worshipped, equally with the Father? Our Saviour adds, *He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.—As the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man.†*

There is a peculiar propriety, if we may presume so to speak, in the appointment of Christ to be the judge of men, because he has himself

\* John v. 21.

† John v. 26.

been made flesh, or taken a human *body*; because he has been *in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*\* As the Redeemer of mankind, as having the power of conferring eternal life, he is spoken of in the Scriptures under the title of the Son of God: as having taken their nature upon him, as the second Adam, and as the great judge of the human race, he is called the Son of Man.

Our Lord then states, that he can do nothing distinctly from, and independently of the Father; that the same judgment, which the Father would pronounce, will be pronounced by the Son; who, in knowledge, and in will, is one with the Father: *I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just: because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.*†

Let us now briefly recapitulate the chief points of this remarkable discourse to the Jews. Our Lord declares, that he came from the Father; that he did nothing of his own independent will and judgment, as distinct from those of the Father; but every thing in intimate conjunction with him; that he was the Son of God, and, as such, co-equal with him in power and

\* Heb. iv. 15.

† John v. 30.

authority; that he was appointed to raise the dead, and to judge the human race according to their works; that he was therefore the Messiah, spoken of by the prophets, and expected by the Jews; *Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me:—had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?\**

To him, who can rise from the perusal of this chapter of St. John, unmoved by the evidence which it affords to the great doctrine of a divine Redeemer, we may surely apply the same language of expostulation in which our Lord addressed the Jews. No reasoning, no moral demonstration will satisfy *him*, who will not receive, with simplicity and meekness, the plain words of Scripture. We refer him to the Evangelist, the companion and friend of Christ; we intreat him seriously and candidly to weigh *his* testimony, against the surmises of his own limited understanding; and if he still remain in a state of doubt and unbelief, all further argument is vain; *if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?*

\* John v. 39, 46.

## LECTURE IV.

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JOHN viii. 58.

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was,  
I am.*

WE have already considered those expressions in the six first chapters of this Gospel, which bear most strongly upon the point of our Saviour's divinity. Before we proceed to examine the following chapters, let us take notice of the manner in which our Lord on all occasions spoke of God as *the Father*, in contradistinction to himself, as *the Son*; and of the still more peculiar expression of *my Father*, which he used without any qualification or definition; whereas in addressing his disciples, he spoke of God, as *of their heavenly Father—their Father in heaven*. "Christ has directed us to say, *Our Father*; a form of speech which he never used himself; sometimes he calls him *the Father*, sometimes

*my Father*, sometimes *your*, but never *our*: he makes no such conjunction of us to himself, as to make no distinction between us and himself."\*

Towards the conclusion of the eighth chapter, our Saviour tells the Jews; *your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad*: he rejoiced in the promise, that *in his seed all nations of the earth should be blessed*: he understood it to refer to a future Redeemer; and he exulted in the prospect. *The Scripture*, says St. Paul, *foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.*† The faith which the same Apostle attributes to the patriarchs and holy men of old, was a faith in the promised Redeemer. But the Jews understood Jesus to say, that Abraham had seen him alive; upon which they asked, with a natural incredulity, *Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?* Our Saviour answers them, according to their own sense of his words, in the affirmative. From their misapprehension he takes occasion to place his superiority to Abraham in a fresh point of

\* Bp. Pearson on the Creed, Art. I. from Augustin.

† Gal. iii. 8.

view; and tells the Jews, that although as a man, he was by many ages younger than that patriarch, yet that he existed before him. This was, in fact, declaring himself to be the Messiah; whose pre-existence, as I stated before, was a received notion amongst the Jews.

What do the Unitarians say to this? They insert a word in the text, "Before Abraham was born, I am *he*," and then explain it thus; "My mission was settled and certain before the birth of Abraham." But what is the force of *he*? It is equivalent, they say, to "the Christ;" as in the 24th and 28th verses of the same chapter, where it is inserted in our received version. But it is evident, that the Jews did not conceive Jesus to assert that he was the Messiah, till he made the declaration in the text; and the text contains no such assertion, unless it be taken to imply a pre-existence. In that sense the Jews understood it; and perceiving immediately that Jesus professed himself the Messiah, they no longer set any bounds to their anger, but *took up stones to cast at him*.

If it be asked, why should that profession of Messiahship, upon the part of our Saviour, have excited in the breasts of the Jews such a



transport of rage?—we reply, because they expected their Messiah to be a divine person, the Son of God; and therefore considered it nothing short of blasphemy, for an obscure and mean individual, such as Jesus appeared to be, to lay claim to that character. So in the tenth chapter, ver. 30, when our Lord declared, in the plainest and most direct terms, his intimate union with God, *I and my Father are one*, the Jews understood him, as every common reader or hearer must, in the obvious sense of the words; and *they took up stones again to stone him*: and when he inquired for which of his good works they treated him so; they answered him, *For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because thou, being a man, makest thyself God*. Upon that occasion, our Saviour, not condescending to enter into an explanation of that sublime feature of the Gospel to prejudiced and obstinate men, shows them that, upon the authority of their own Scriptures, he might with propriety be called the Son of God, as having received an authority from God far superior to that which was entrusted to magistrates and kings under the old covenant, and yet even they were called gods: *Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?*

*If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken (i. e. cannot be called in question), say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said I am the Son of God?* Our Saviour's argument then is this: Scripture gives the appellation of gods to those, who are ordained of God to exercise earthly dominion: how much more am I entitled to the appellation of Son of God, who have received of the Spirit without measure, and am sent into the world to establish a spiritual kingdom? He argues upon the received principles of the Jews themselves, and shows that, even according to them, he is not guilty of blasphemy: the higher grounds of justification he leaves untouched.

The blasphemy, which the Jews imputed to our Lord, consisted in his assuming the title of the Son of God, which they considered to belong exclusively to their Messiah. It is to be remarked, that to his disciples, and to the woman of Samaria, he avowed himself the Christ; to the Scribes and Pharisees he spoke of himself under the appellation of the Son of God. Now the assumption of the Messiahship was not blasphemy, unless it was considered to be the

assumption of a divine character : and that it was so considered by the Jews, appears from St. Mark's account ; *Again the High Priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ (or Messiah) the Son of the Blessed ? And Jesus said, I am : and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the High Priest rent his clothes, and said, What need we any further witnesses ? Ye have heard the BLASPHEMY ; what think ye ? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.\**

From a comparison of these passages, it is plain that the Jews applied to the Messiah the title of Son of God, in a sense which implied some sort of participation in the divine nature ; that Jesus adopted the appellation, and applied it to himself, in a manner which asserted that participation ; and that, in consequence, the Jews accused him of blasphemy. They knew the birth, parentage, and condition of the man Jesus ; whereas they expected that the Messiah would make his first appearance upon earth in Bethlehem ; but that no man would know his origin. This appears from St. John's description of the hesitation expressed by the people, when

\* Mark xiv. 61.

they heard Jesus speaking boldly in the temple ; *Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ ? Howbeit we know this man whence he is : but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is.\**—While others said, *Shall Christ come out of Galilee ? Hath not the Scripture said, that Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was ?†*

Upon the whole it is apparent, that the Jews entertained very high and magnificent, though perhaps somewhat indefinite notions, of the dignity of their expected Messiah ; and our Saviour, far from insinuating that those notions were unfounded, spoke of himself to the learned Jews, under the most exalted of all the titles, which they applied to the Messiah ; and in language, which implied an intimate and unparalleled union of himself with the Father in counsel, power, and will.

Nevertheless, during the period of his ministry, *he was found in fashion as a man,†* and humbled

\* John. vii. 26.

† Perhaps there were two parties, entertaining these two opinions ; one, that the Messiah was to be born at Bethlehem ; the other, that he was to appear suddenly amongst them, no man knowing whence.

‡ Phil. ii. 8.

himself, in that character, before the majesty of the Father. When certain Greeks,\* who came up to Jerusalem, to worship at the feast, had demanded to see Jesus, and, as it seems probable, had been introduced to him by Andrew and Philip,† Jesus spoke of himself as the *Son of Man*: *The hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified.* The Son of God, as such, was incapable of further glorification: but having taken upon him our flesh, the hour was at hand, when he was to suffer death upon the cross; to rise from the grave; to ascend into heaven; and to sit on the right hand of the Father in glory: in the glory which he had with him before the world was.‡ But the first step in this ascent to glory was painful to that nature, which the divine Word had taken upon himself; and his voluntary submission to it was that great act of obedience, which was so meritorious in the sight of God, and which remedied the evil effects of man's disobedience. Now there would have been no extraordinary merit in *obeying* that ordinance of the divine wisdom, which required the sacrifice of his life, unless he had had the power

\* *i. e.* Greek proselytes, or converts to the Jewish religion.

† John xii. 20.

‡ John xvii. 5.

of *disobeying*; that is, unless he had been equal in authority with the Father.

Our Saviour's power, as a divine Being, rendered his submission, as a man, to the penalty of death, inexpressibly worthy. So argues the Apostle to the Hebrews: *Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.\** But the nature, which he had condescended to take upon him, he took with all its feelings and infirmities; and therefore he was not insensible to the severity of the trials which awaited him. The dignity of his superior nature is thus perfectly reconcilable with the humility which displayed itself, when the Son of Man thus addressed himself to God; *Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.†*—My mind is troubled at the approach of a violent death. What then shall I say? shall this be

\* Heb. v. 7.

† John xii. 27.

my prayer, Father, save me from this hour?— Yet I know, that to undergo this season of trial and trouble was the very object of my coming.— Compare this with what took place at Gethsemane, on the eve of his crucifixion. Our Saviour in that trying moment said, *My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.—O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.\** From these incidents we may take occasion to remark, once for all, that our blessed Lord, in speaking of himself to the Jews, in the character of the Messiah, asserted the dignity of his nature, and his right to the most exalted of those titles, which they applied to their expected Redeemer, the very Son of God; but in the company of his disciples, when referring to the humiliation which he was about to undergo, for the purpose of accomplishing the salvation of mankind, and in the presence of the people, to whom he was desirous of exhibiting an example of piety, and submission, and trust in God; and of marking his sense of the superintending providence of his heavenly Father over the good; he spoke of himself as the Son of Man, and had recourse to audible and fervent prayer. With this

\* Matt. xxvi. 38.

impression, as to the motives which influenced our Saviour, in his discourses with these different kinds of men, we shall find no difficulty in the words which he addressed to his disciples, *If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father : for my Father is greater than I.\**

In the thirteenth chapter of St. John, we have these words: *Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God—riseth from supper—and began to wash the disciples' feet.†* It is evident, that the Evangelist intended to contrast the humility of the action with the dignity and authority of the person who performed it. Our Lord said to his disciples after his resurrection, *All power is given unto me, in heaven and in earth;‡* where the words, *in heaven*, prove that this power is not to be understood merely of the influence which his religion was to exercise over the hearts of men, but of an actual and positive dominion over the universe.—*That he was come from God, and went, or was going to God.* Now as he was going to ascend personally into heaven, so his coming from heaven must be understood of

\* John xiv. 28. † John xiii. 3, 4, 5. ‡ Matt. xxviii. 18.



a personal descent from the abode of the divine Majesty, where he "was with God in the beginning." The circumstance itself, of our Saviour's having performed for his disciples one of the meanest offices of a servant, is a practical lesson of that condescension and kindness, which Christians are bound to exercise towards one another; and a signal illustration of that emphatic description given by St. Paul; *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation,\* and took upon him the form of a servant.†*

Towards the conclusion of his ministry our Lord spoke more plainly to his disciples of his approaching sufferings and death; and his discourses took a more affectionate and consolatory tone; *Let not your heart be troubled; Ye believe in God, believe also in me.‡* Here again we may ask, could such a mode of speech have been used, without presumption, by a mere man? Still more applicable is this question to what follows, *He that hath seen me hath seen the Father;§* which words infer at least a

\* Literally, "emptied himself," i. e. of his glory.

† Phil. ii. 5. "A slave."

‡ John xiv. 1.

§ John xiv. 9.

parity and perfect agreement with the Father, such as no man could lay claim to. Again, *Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me.\** In the 13th verse our Saviour says, *whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.* Here is a plain declaration, that whatsoever degree of power the Apostles might require, and pray for, as his disciples, he himself would grant it; and that, for a particular purpose, that God the Father might be glorified by the establishment of a religion, the foundation of which was to be a belief in God the Son. The Father and the Son are here spoken of in terms of perfect similarity, as to nature and quality; and let us here again inquire, could a mere human prophet have made such a promise as this, that he would himself grant the prayer of his followers?

In the 16th verse of this chapter, our Saviour gives to his Apostles the promise of a Comforter, who should supply the place of their Master, guide, and friend, now about to be taken from them into glory. *I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever,*

\* John xiv. 11.

*even the Spirit of truth.* After his resurrection from the dead, and previous to his ascension, our Lord breathed on the Apostles, and said, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.\** From these words it appears, that the Holy Ghost was at that time conferred upon the Apostles, as far as the spiritual authority of their office was concerned; although the actual descent of the Spirit did not take place till the feast of Pentecost. And we may remark, that when our Lord said to the Apostles, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost,* he took upon himself to do, by his own authority, that which he had told them he would pray the Father to do. As the man Jesus, in which character he was then best known to his disciples, he had said to them, *I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter:* as the Lord of life, triumphant over the spiritual enemies of mankind, he spoke with the authority of the Son of God, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost:* so true was his assertion, *All things that the Father hath, are mine.†* You will observe also, that, as at one time the Comforter is described

\* John xx. 22.

† John xvi. 15.

as coming from the Father, while at another time our Saviour said, *I will send the promise of my Father upon you*; it follows, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son, as well as from the Father; a truth which Christ most emphatically declared, by coupling the words, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost*, with that significant action of breathing upon the Apostles.

These doctrines, it may be said, are mysterious. How can they be otherwise? seeing that they relate to a nature different from and infinitely superior to our own? Let it not be supposed that we are attempting to give any explanation whatever of the *mode* of existence, by which the two natures were united in Christ. It is sufficient for us to know, that he is described in Scripture as the only-begotten Son, one with the Father; that he emptied himself of his glory; took upon him the form of a servant; was made in the likeness of man; and that he was, to all intents and purposes, a man, during his sojourn upon earth. If all these points are separately and distinctly insisted upon in the word of God—as to any common apprehension they certainly are—it is not our part to devise schemes for avoiding the difficulties of revelation, with the vain hope of reducing all that is told us, of the nature

and dispensations of God, to the level of our own understanding; but to take each truth separately, as we find it declared in Scripture, and to confess *that great is the mystery of godliness.*

Let us be contented with the knowledge which God has been pleased to impart to us of himself, and receive it such as he has revealed it, without presuming to apply the measure of our own comprehension, limited and imperfect as it is, to the communications of that Holy Spirit, who is known to us only so far as he has seen fit to disclose himself in his Word. How just is the observation of St. Paul: *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

But they are not the less true because they surpass our natural understandings: the simple question being, with us, whether they be declared in the Word of God? For the rest, let us be content to wait, till we enter into that more pure and spiritual existence, where the twilight of this uncertain state shall give place to the clearness of the perfect day; and we shall be admitted to behold the ineffable brightness of the Divinity; the majesty of the Father; the

glory of the only-begotten Son ; and the pure effulgence of that Holy Spirit, who now vouchsafes to us only a glimpse of the skirts of eternal light.

## LECTURE V.

—◆—  
JOHN xvii. 3.

*And this is life eternal; that they might know thee, the only true God; and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*

THE plan of God's mercy to mankind was one of those secrets of the divine government, into which even the angels might desire to look. Intimations of its nature and extent were at sundry times, and in divers manners, as the Apostle says, conveyed to mankind by the prophets; but it was not disclosed in all its important features, till it had been completed by the death of the Redeemer. Even the Apostles, the constant friends and followers of Christ, did not fully understand the vastness of the divine mercy, nor the means, by which it was to be conferred upon mankind, till the covenant of grace was sealed with the blood of the Mediator, and the promise of the Comforter

fulfilled by the descent of the Holy Ghost. How little appearance was exhibited by the Saviour of the world during his abode upon earth, of that exalted nature which alone could impart an adequate worthiness to the sacrifice about to be offered by him for the sins of the whole world! But this was the trial of men's faith. Jesus displayed sufficient proofs of his divine mission: A Pharisee confessed, *we know that no man can do the things which thou doest, except God be with him.\** It was therefore the part of reasonable men, and sincere lovers of truth, to commit themselves to his guidance; and to wait patiently for a knowledge of the plan of redemption, till he should think fit to impart it. This is the line of conduct which the Apostles pursued; and our Lord commended them for it, in that beautiful address to his heavenly Father, which is contained in the seventeenth chapter of St. John; *I have manifested thy name to the men, which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things, whatsoever thou hast given me, are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest*

\* John iii. 2.



*me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.*

Our Saviour here declares, that his Apostles were fully convinced of his being indeed the Messiah. This was the extent of their knowledge, and of their faith, at that period. They were to be endowed with a more perfect apprehension of the things concerning the Gospel covenant, upon receiving from on high the promised gift of the Spirit. In the mean time it was sufficient, for the purposes of proving their sincerity, and of securing their fidelity, if they were assured that Jesus was the Christ. Many things there were, relating to the great mystery of godliness, which they were not qualified to hear, till the season of their Lord's humiliation should be past. Our Saviour told them, *I have yet many things to say unto you; but ye cannot bear them now.\** But after his resurrection, during the forty days which he spent in the company of his disciples, he *spoke to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God;†* that is, relating to the Christian dispensation.

\* John xvi. 12.

† Acts i. 3.

In his character of Messiah, as sent by the Father into the world, he offered up a prayer at the same time for his own glorification, and for the perseverance and final recompense of the Apostles: *Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.\** Our Saviour, in his human nature, prays to the Father for the instruction and comfort of his disciples, in words, which at once express his humiliation, as the Son of Man, and his participation in the divine glory. The effect, for which he prayed, was to be reciprocal; *glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.* This is not the language of a creature to his Creator.—*As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is eternal life, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*

By those who deny the divinity of Christ, this passage has always been considered one of their strong-holds. We are desired to “observe, that there is but one true God, and that Jesus Christ is expressly excluded from being that true God, and contradistinguished from him as his messenger.”

\* John xvi. 1.

That there is but one true God, we admit, and assert, as fully and unequivocally as these interpreters themselves: that there is any thing in this, or any other text of Scripture, which expressly excludes Jesus Christ from being that true God, we deny. There is no *contradistinction* in this passage between God, and Christ; but between the one true God, and the false gods of the heathens; this is apparent from the use of the epithet *true*, which has no force at all, as a mark of contradistinction, except as opposed to false. It is here applied, as it is by St. Paul, *and how ye turned from IDOLS to serve the living and TRUE God.\**

So far are our Saviour's words from containing a plain contradistinction between God and Christ, as to their nature, that the knowledge of Christ is put upon a level with the knowledge of God. The only distinction, which really is made, is between the Father, who *sent his only-begotten Son into the world*, and the Son, in his character of Messiah, who was so sent. The true meaning of the passage, both as to the knowledge of which it speaks, and the objects of that knowledge, is illustrated by the following words of St. John, in the conclusion of his first Epistle;

\* 1 Thess. i. 9.

*And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true: and we are in him that is true; even in his Son Jesus Christ. THIS is the true God and eternal life.* In which passage it is evident that the epithet TRUE, means 'true God:' *we are in him that is the true God, even in his Son Jesus Christ. THIS is the true God, &c.*

The words in the text may therefore be understood as follows: "And this is life eternal; to know the true God, as he has revealed himself in and by Christ; and to know Christ, as he has declared himself united with and sent by the Father." It is not life eternal, to know and recognize God as the creator and governor of the universe; for such a knowledge was possessed by the Jews before the Gospel dispensation; nay, by the evil angels themselves: but to know him, as planning and accomplishing the scheme of man's redemption, by the ministry and death of his Son; and to recognize the Son as the author and finisher of salvation, that indeed is life eternal.

The same tenour of language is observable throughout the whole of our Saviour's most solemn and affecting prayer. He declares, with

a tone of conscious satisfaction, which would ill accord with the deficiencies of a sinful man, *I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.* Our Lord himself had said to his disciples; *when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants.\** But what is his own language? *And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I AM GLORIFIED in them.†*

The intimate connexion and conjunction of the Son with the Father is strongly expressed in our Saviour's prayer for the Apostles: *Holy Father, keep through thine own name‡ those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, AS WE ARE:§* which expression implies, at least, such a community of counsel and will with God, as no being, merely human, could have asserted. Again, our Lord prays, that the Father will sanctify the Apostles through his truth;|| but

\* Luke xvii. 10.

† John xvii. 4, 5, 10.

‡ Rather in *thine own name*; i. e. in the profession of the true religion.

§ John xvii. 11.

|| John xvii. 17.

of himself he says, *For their sakes I sanctify MYSELF; that they also might be sanctified through the truth.\**

Again; *that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one IN US: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.* The intimate love and union, subsisting between the Father and the Son, is the model of that love which ought to subsist between Christians, as far as the difference of their natures will permit. But surely no *man* could pretend to the same reciprocity of feeling and will, between God and himself, which connects man with man: no human prophet, nor inspired teacher, would presume to couple his own name with that of the Deity in such a phrase as this; *Let my disciples be in us!*

Our Saviour prays that this union between his disciples may be perfected, in order that the world might see the love of God towards them, in its effects, as clearly as they had seen it displayed towards the Redeemer himself, in the communication of miraculous power; *that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me*†, i. e. that

\* John xvii. 19.

† John xvii. 23.

mankind at large may be assured, from the blessed effects of that unanimity with which they shall be inspired, that the author of that religion which produces those effects, has indeed been sent by thee; and that thou lovest these my disciples, not indeed in the same degree, but as evidently as thou hast loved me.

What follows in the 24th verse is still more remarkable: *Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me, where I am: that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.* How noble and striking an assertion of his own pre-existence and exalted nature! Our Saviour desires that his disciples may in due time be with him, in the place whither he was then going; that they might behold, not only his Father's glory, but his own; his own glory as the divine Word. Here again St. John's Epistle illustrates his Gospel; *Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when HE shall appear, we shall be like him; FOR WE SHALL SEE HIM AS HE IS.*

I am not called upon, by the nature of my subject, to consider at length the concluding scenes of our Saviour's ministry. After his

resurrection, when he appeared to Mary Magdalene, he used these remarkable words,—*Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and unto my God and your God.*\* Although I would not lay any great stress upon this mode of expression, in this particular instance; yet when we take into consideration the manner in which our Saviour usually spoke of God as *his Father*, and as the Father of his disciples, but not under the common term of *our Father*, this disjunctive description appears to be deserving of remark.† The Evangelist has recorded a more striking testimony to the divinity of our Lord, in the confession of a doubting apostle: *Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, my Lord and my God.*‡ This appears to be a direct and unequivocal confession of our Saviour's divine nature. The Unitarians say that it is only an exclamation of surprise; 'My Lord and my God, how great is thy power!' It is quite certain that the words 'my Lord' refer to our Saviour; and in an exclamation, like that

\* John xx. 17. † See Lect. IV. p. 301. ‡ John xx. 27.



of Thomas, which was occasioned by the joyful certainty of his Master's resurrection, we can hardly separate the two members of the sentence, and apply one to Christ, and the other to God. Had St. John so understood it, he would have taken care to record it in such a manner (supposing him to have entertained the same notions with the Unitarians) as not to give it the *semblance* of a direct acknowledgment of Christ's divine nature. He would have told us, that Thomas said, My Lord! and shortly afterwards, my God! or something to that effect. But a fatal objection to the Unitarian interpretation is this; St. John says expressly, that this exclamation was addressed to Jesus; *Thomas answered and said unto him.* Besides which, our Saviour commended it as a confession of faith; which it would not have been, had it expressed only surprise. This passage is the more deserving of our attention, because it is the first time that Christ is called God by any of his disciples.

After having related this incident, the Evangelist declares the object and intent of his Gospel; *These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through his name.*

We have now considered the manner in which St. John has executed his purpose. He commences his work with a full, precise, and positive declaration of the eternal pre-existence and divine nature of the Word; of his agency in the work of creation; of his incarnation and residence amongst men. He then details, in succession, those discourses of our Saviour, in which, while there is a constant reference to his office of a divine legate, there are also frequent and striking allusions to his participation in the divine nature. Not one of these allusions is explained away by St. John; there is not a word, which can be construed into an assertion of our Saviour's simple humanity; but there are many passages, which plainly imply his divinity; and which cannot be otherwise explained, without doing violence to the natural propriety of language, and to the most unquestionable rules of interpretation.

The intention of the Evangelist displays itself in every page of his Gospel. It was, to exhibit Jesus, as the true Messiah; the restorer of the human race, not by his doctrines only, but by his death; as the Son of God, existent from eternity, with the Father; having all things that the Father hath; and doing all things which

the Father doeth; and to be honoured by all men, even as they honour the Father. All these points St. John in the first instance briefly, but pointedly asserts; and afterwards proves them at large, by the words of Jesus himself. And in conclusion he tells us that his object was, not to record all the wonderful things which Jesus did, but only such particulars as might convince mankind that he was the Son of God; not merely a prophet, (for that he was proved to be by his miracles, which the other Evangelists had related,) but the very Son of the Most High, which he repeatedly declared himself to be, in the discourses preserved by St. John. I will conclude with a brief recapitulation of the principal doctrines which are taught in this remarkable Gospel.

So God loved the world, that he *gave* (*i. e.* to death) his only-begotten Son, that men might be saved by their belief in him *as such*. Jesus Christ was this only-begotten Son; the Son of God, in a manner, and by a mode of generation, peculiar to himself. He had God for *his own* Father, and was equal to him;\* existing with him before he appeared in the flesh; and sent by him upon earth.† He had dwelt with his

\* John v. 18.

† John iii. 13, 17.

Father in glory, before the world was; he had come from that glory, and returned to it.\* He was exactly equal, in attributes and powers, to the Father, and is to be worshipped as the Father. The Father and the Son have a perfect unity of counsel, will and operation. And there is the same unity subsisting between the Holy Spirit and the Father, and between the Holy Spirit and the Son.†

We are further taught, that Christ came upon earth to save mankind, by dying for them upon the cross: that he was the Messiah sent from God, who had been promised to the holy men of old; and spoken of by Moses and the prophets: that he did nothing without the direction and consent of the Father; and taught nothing but what he had heard, not by divine inspiration, like the prophets, but by intimate communication with the Father in heaven: that he laid down his life, by the command of his Father; and yet that he had power of himself to lay it down, and to take it again:‡ that the same credence is to be given to the Son, as to the Father: that it is the Son

\* John vi. 38, 62; viii. 42; xvi. 28; xvii. 5.

† John v. 17, 19, 23, 26; x. 30; xvi. 13, 15, &c.

‡ John iii. 14, 15; v. 19; viii. 38; x. 17, 18.

who has the power of conferring eternal life upon believers,\* and that he is to be the judge of mankind.

These are the leading points of that faith, which is described in the Gospel of St. John, as being necessary to salvation; to illustrate and establish it was the object of his writing. Some of the ancient heretics, at a very early period, finding it impossible to evade the force of that testimony, which this Gospel affords, to the divinity of Christ, rejected it altogether, as containing erroneous doctrines. This is a striking evidence of the impression which it is calculated to produce upon the mind; and the very fact, of its being calculated to produce such an impression, affords a strong argument in behalf of our interpretation; since it is highly improbable, that at a time, when the church had begun to be distracted by heresies concerning the nature of Christ, an Apostle should have employed expressions, which to all appearance assert the divinity of our Saviour, if he had known that doctrine to be unfounded.

The great and sublime truths which this Evangelist proclaimed in his Gospel, he reiterated in his Epistles. He there describes Christ

\* John vi. 39; xvii. 2.

as the Word of life; the Son of God, and eternal life; as cleansing us by his blood from all sin; as having laid down his life for us; as having *come in the flesh*; as *sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world*; and as *born of God*; as *an advocate with the Father, and the propitiation for our sins*. He warns us, and it is indeed an awful warning, that *whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father*.\* And he concludes with those words, which, if I have succeeded in explaining his views, you will now without hesitation adopt, in their literal and unqualified sense; *we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true; and we are in him that is true; even in his Son Jesus Christ.* THIS IS THE TRUE GOD, AND ETERNAL LIFE.”

\* 1 John i. 2, 7; ii. 1, 23; iii. 16; iv. 3, 14; v. 1.



# NOTES

TO THE

LECTURES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.





## NOTES.

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### LECTURE I.

P. 10. *decided the question by lots.*] See Lev. xvi. 8. Josh. xviii. 6. 1 Sam. x. 20. 1 Chron. xxiv. 5. Bishop Beveridge, Sermons, Vol. I. p. 59, assigns the reason, which rendered necessary, in this instance, a direct and special appeal to the Holy Ghost, who, having taken upon him to supply the place of Christ to his Church, chose two Apostles, in as plain and apparent a manner as Christ himself had done it. The superstitious custom of drawing lots, which afterwards crept into the Christian Church, is, perhaps, less to be referred to this single transaction of the Apostles, than to the adoption of a heathen custom. Instead of the *sortes Homericæ* or *Virgilianæ*, the early Christians drew lots from the Bible; and even stated offices of worship were used beforehand. This practice was sometimes resorted to by the priests, for the ends of gain. An instance occurs, in the Decretals, of a *sacerdos sortilegus*, who was excommunicated for this offence. The following is Jerome's sensible caution against abusing the example of the Apostles: "Non statim debemus sub exemplo Jonæ sortibus credere, vel illud de Actibus Apostolorum huic testimonio copulare, ubi sorte in Apostolatam Matthias eligitur; *cum privilegia singulorum non possint facere legem communem.*" See Boehmer's Corpus Juris

Canonici, T. I. p. 876. The following letter is the best illustration I can offer of the danger pointed out in the text. A question arose, after Mr. Wesley's death, whether the Methodist preachers had any scriptural authority to administer the Holy Communion. The question was decided by lot, and the Conference wrote as follows, *To the Members of our Societies, who desire to receive the Lord's Supper from the hands of their own preachers.*

“VERY DEAR BRETHREN,

“The Conference desire us to write to you, in their name, in the most tender and affectionate manner, and to inform you of the event of their deliberations concerning the administration of the Lord's Supper. After debating the subject time after time, we were greatly divided in sentiment. In short, we knew not what to do that peace and union might be preserved. At last, one of the senior brethren (Mr. Pawson) proposed that we should commit the matter to God by putting the question to the lot, considering that the Oracles of God declare, that ‘the lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty.’ And again, ‘that the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.’ And considering also that we have the example of the Apostles themselves, *in a matter, which we thought, all things considered, of less importance!* We accordingly prepared the lots; and four of us prayed. God was surely then present, yea, *his glory filled the room.* Almost all the preachers were in tears, and, as they afterwards confessed, felt an undoubted assurance that God himself would decide. Mr. Adam Clarke was then called on to draw the lot, which was, ‘You shall not administer the sacrament the ensuing year.’ All were satisfied. All submitted. All was peace. Every countenance seemed to testify that every heart said, ‘It is the Lord, let him do what

seemeth him good.' A minute was then formed according to the previous explanation of the lots, that the sacrament should not be administered in our Connexion, for the ensuing year, *except in London*. The prohibition reaches the Clergy of the Church of England, as well as the other brethren. We do assure you, dear brethren, we should have been perfectly resigned if the lot had fallen on the other side. Yea, we should, as far as Christian prudence and expediency would have justified, have encouraged the administration of the Lord's Supper by the preachers; because we had not a doubt but God was *uncommonly present* on the occasion, and *did himself decide*.

"Signed, in behalf of the Conference,

"ALEXANDER MATHER, *President*,

"THOMAS COKE, *Secretary*."

"*London, July, 1792.*"

And yet, although we are assured that "God was uncommonly present on the occasion, and did himself decide," and decide generally, the Conference took upon themselves to make an exception (an exception from the divine decision) in favour of London, without casting lots a second time. Some judicious animadversions are made upon the gross inconsistency, not to say the profane presumption of such conduct, by Mr. Mark Robinson, in his Letter on Church Methodism, p. 74. A somewhat similar transaction on the part of certain Bohemian and Moravian Presbyters is related by Dr. Hickes, in his Letter to the Author of Lay Baptism Invalid, p. liv. I will subjoin Bishop Stillingfleet's remarks addressed to a certain prelate, who made a vow that he would resign his bishopric, in case it should be so determined by lot; and "having fasted, prayed, and received the sacrament, of two lots took up one, as received from God; and

before opening, on his knees promised performance, and the lot was for resigning---but some time after, a great scruple arose in his mind. The Apostles (whose practice was his main motive) had the Holy Ghost to guide them; he had not. They did it to determine a necessary point; his was a voluntary matter.---Whereupon he had recourse a second time to lots, concluding that God would not suffer him twice to be misguided." Upon this strange instance of weakness Dr. Stillingfleet observes, "This is no competent way for any man to judge what the mind of God is in such a case. To fast and pray to understand the mind of God, about things which we have sufficient rules to direct us in, is the fundamental principle of enthusiasm; and was the method of those who, by virtue of this principle, were carried to do such things which we profess to abhor. I think it were far better to fast and pray for wisdom and courage to do our duty, than to know whether we are to do it or no. It may be just with God to suffer those to be deluded, and entangled in their own snares, who are rather asking God what they are to do than setting themselves about their work."—"It is a thing very presumptuous for any particular person to imagine the Providence of God will concern itself as much about his affairs, as about the choice of an Apostle. But the wise man says, *The lot is cast into the lap, and the whole disposing thereof is from the Lord:* which signifies no more than that the most casual and uncertain things are under the disposition of divine Providence; not as though God would declare his mind every time men cast lots, though they should do it never so seriously; and to expect God should do that which he hath never promised to do, is in plain terms, tempting of God; which is, calling in the help of extraordinary Providence, where God hath never promised it; as appears by our Saviour's answer to the Devil's temptation. Again, it is impossible for any man to come to any satisfaction in his

mind this way; for he can have no assurance that the lots did express the mind of God, unless he would try that by another lot, and so run on till he be entangled, that he can find nothing to rest upon."—*Miscellaneous Discourses*, p. 21.

P. 12. *cloven.*] I have employed the word used by our translators, although *διαμεριζόμεναι* means not *cloven*, but *distributed among them*. I should not have thought it worth while to direct the reader's attention to the right interpretation of this phrase, had not a fanciful propriety been discovered by some commentators in the supposed *cloven* form of each tongue of fire.

P. 13. *There are two channels, &c.*] This paragraph is in great measure taken from Ernesti's Dissertation *de Dono Linguarum*, in his *Opuscula Theologica*, p. 457.

P. 16. *such as should be saved.*] *τοὺς σωζομένους*. Dr. Hammond interprets this, *those that did escape*, having complied with the direction given in v. 40, *σώθητε ἀπὸ τῆς γενεᾶς τῆς σκολιᾶς ταύτης*. Our translators have rendered it as though it were *σωθησομένους*.

*Ibid. continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine.*] *ἦσαν προσκαρτεροῦντες τῇ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων*, *continued steadily and closely attending to the teaching of the Apostles*, who, as we are informed, in c. v. ver. 42, *daily in the temple, and in every house, ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ*. So in 1 Tim. iv. 13, *Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine*. It should rather be *to teaching*: as in Rom. xii. 7, *or he that teacheth on teaching*. Our translators, however, used the word *doctrine* in this sense, which is no longer given to it in common discourse. Mark iv. 2, *And he taught them many things by parables; and said*

unto them in his doctrine. Matth. vii. 28, *When Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine.*

Ibid. *and fellowship.*] τῇ κοινωνίᾳ καὶ τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου. Chrysostom, on 1 Cor. x. 16, *the bread which we break, is it not the communion (κοινωνία) of the body of Christ?* refers to this passage of the Acts, so as to make it appear that he understood τῇ κοινωνίᾳ to refer to the communion of the Eucharist, and that it was to be coupled with τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου. So Bishop Pearson, Joseph Mede, and others; while many have understood it of a community, or communication of goods, viz. to the poor: so Heinrichs and Kuinoel. But with this last interpretation the word προσκαρτεροῦντες seems to be incompatible; and with the former, the absolute use of κοινωνία. I am therefore disposed to adhere to the interpretation of our translators. See Bishop Pearson, Lect. in Act. Apost. p. 34.

P. 17. *from house to house.*] κατ' οἶκον, more correctly rendered, *in the house: domi, not domatim.* οἶκον is here expressly distinguished from ἱερόν. So Scaliger, Hammond, Beveridge, Cave, Wolf, and the Arabic and Syriac versions. See Joseph Mede's Works, I. p. 409.

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## LECTURE II.

P. 22. *They spoke more largely, &c.*] I would not be understood as alluding to the notion of a *Disciplina Arcani*, imparted only to the more worthy; but simply to the *order* of instruction which would naturally be observed by the teachers of a new religion.

P. 29. *By the laws of God and nature.*] See Locke on Government, c. 4, sect. 42.

P. 32. *This expression, &c.*] I follow the interpretation of Hammond, which is also maintained by Kuinoel, in opposition to Rosenmüller.

P. 33. *By the advice of Gamaliel.*] It is surprising that any persons should have conjectured from this incident, that Gamaliel was a Christian. The readiness, with which the council acceded to his advice proves that *they* had no suspicion of his leaning to the new doctrine; and yet that they were suspicious enough, appears from their rebuke to Nicodemus, John vii. 52. "Mihi quidem," says Pearson, "videtur Gamalielem, pertinacissimum Phariseum, ideo consilium dedisse ut dimitterentur Apostoli, quod Sadducei eos accusarent, quodque ipsi tam strenue resurrectionem tuerentur." See Witsius Meletem. Leid, p. 13.

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### LECTURE III.

P. 36. *Grecians.*] Ἑλληνιστάι. Bishop Pearson thinks that this word denotes exclusively the "Proselytes of Righteousness," converted heathens, who had been circumcised, and had taken on themselves all the obligations of the Mosaic law. So Camerarius, Beza, and Salmasius. Scaliger, Grotius, and Hammond understand the Jews, who lived out of Palestine and used the Greek language, (or, as they suppose, Greek words, but a Syrochaldæe idiom.) It is well known how sharply this question was contested by Daniel Heinsius and Salmasius. In my opinion, we are to under-



stand both the classes of persons whom I have mentioned in the text. I think it is clear, from  $\nu. 5$ , that the six first-mentioned deacons were Jews, because Nicolaus is expressly distinguished from them, as a proselyte. Ἑλληνιστής is properly a person who has adopted Grecian habits, whether of speech, or manners. One is surprised to find a Pharisee of Jerusalem, a ruler of the Jews, with the Grecian name of Nicodemus. Probably his father was a Hellenistic Jew. Basnage, Exercit. Crit. p. 8, contends that the Hellenistæ were Proselytes.

P. 38. *These were the first bishops.*] The reader will find a very clear and convincing "Defence of Episcopacy derived from the New Testament," amongst the Tracts of the late W. Hey, p. 571.

P. 38. *In the annals of the early Church.*] By the *early*, I mean the *primitive Church*. If readers were employed at all in the first century, they did not constitute a *spiritual order*, but a *ministerial class* of men.

P. 39. *Libertines, or citizens of Libertum.*] Of the different explanations which are given of the term Libertines, I agree with Schleusner in thinking this the most probable. The position of the word shews that the writer is speaking of the Jews from some town or district in Africa.

P. 44. *a sleep, not as the heathens described it, an endless, hopeless sleep.*] ἀτρέμονα, νήγρετον ὕπνον, Mosehus: the *perpetuus sopor* of Horace. Sometimes, indeed, the heathen poets speak of death as a *sacred sleep*; but in a manner which leaves it doubtful whether they alluded to a future state. Callimachus Epigr. 10, Τῆδε Σάων ὁ Δίκωνος, Ἀκάθιος, ἱερὸν ὕπνον Κοιμᾶται. θνήσκειν μὴ λέγε τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς.

P. 45. *A courage and resolution more than human.*] See in particular the affecting details contained in the Letter from the Churches of Vienne and Lyons, preserved in Eusebius, Hist. V. 1. Routh. Reliq. Sacr. I. p. 267.

P. 53. *Simon Magus.*] It may not be undeserving of mention, since I do not perceive it to be noticed by the latest commentators on the Acts, that Mosheim, in a letter to Lacroze (Epist. Lacroz. T. I. p. 266,) suspects Simon Magus to have been the same person with Apollonius Tyanæus: a very improbable supposition.

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#### LECTURE IV.

For a more extended view of the arguments advanced in this Lecture, the reader is referred to Lord Lyttleton's Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul, Leland's View of the Deistical Writers, and Mr. Hughes's Answer to the publication of some insane unbeliever, the title of which is "Not Paul but Jesus." To these may be added Mr. Townsend's notes in his very useful Chronological Arrangement of the New Testament, Vol. II. p. 88, and Bishop Warburton's View of Lord Bolingbroke's Philosophy.

P. 59. *His name was originally Saul.*] There is a great variety of conjectures as to the reason of this change of name. Basnage thinks that Origen is right, in supposing that Saul had two names, (perhaps as a Jew and a Roman citizen;) and that he was called by one of them while his ministry was confined to his own nation, but by the other upon his going to the Gentiles. This supposition appears

to be confirmed by Acts xiii. 9; *Saul, who is also called Paul*—after which he is always spoken of under the latter name.

P. 61. *An interesting question.*] The following are Bishop Sanderson's remarks:—"St. Paul, though he were a persecutor of the truth, a blasphemers of the Lord, and injurious to the brethren; yet he obtained *mercy*, because he did all that *ignorantly*. His bare *ignorance* was not enough to justify him; but he stood in need of God's *mercy*, or else he had perished in those sins for all his *ignorance*; but yet who can tell, whether ever he should have found that *mercy*, if he had done the same things, and not *in ignorance*? *Ignorance*, then, though it do not *deserve* pardon, yet it often *findeth* it, because it is not joined with open *contempt* of him, that is able to pardon. But he that sinneth against knowledge, doth *ponere obicem* (if you will allow the phrase, and it may be allowed in this sense:) he doth not only *provoke* the justice of God by his *sin*, (as every other sinner doth) but he doth also *dam up the mercy* of God by his *contempt*, and doth his part to shut himself out for ever from all possibility of *pardon*; unless the boundless *overflowing* mercy of God come in upon him with a strong tide, and with an *unresisted current* break itself a passage through."—Sermons, p. 280. Bishop Jeremy Taylor says, "St. Paul's ignorance was very culpable, when in zeal and rage he persecuted the Church of God; but yet this ignorance lessened the malice of the effect, and disposed him greatly towards pardon."—Ductor Dubit. p. 801. St. Paul's ignorance was either *vincible*, or *voluntary*, or both: *vincible*, because there was evidence which ought to have convinced him of the truth of Christianity, if he inquired into it: or *voluntary*, because when he had the opportunity of making that inquiry he would not make it. His ignorance, therefore, was

undoubtedly sinful; and yet his persecution of the Church was rendered less sinful by that ignorance.

P. 64. *The two accounts.*] This is the explanation given by Vitrings and Wolf; and it is confirmed by John xii. 28. *Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people, therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said, that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him.* They heard the noise, but did not distinguish articulate sounds. Skelton says, that St. Paul's attendants heard the words, but did not understand them, for they were Hebrew words. *Senilia, Works, Vol. VI. p. 88.*

P. 81. *Peter was the first, &c.*] These points of pre-eminence are stated by Barrow, in his Treatise of the Pope's Supremacy, p. 558.

P. 83. *great similarity of disposition.*] *πανταχοῦ φαίνονται οὗτοι πολλὴν ἔχοντες πρὸς ἀλλήλους ὁμόνοιαν.* Chrysostom, quoted by Bishop Pearson, Lect. in Acta Apost. p. 39. His words, however, may perhaps be more correctly rendered, *were like-minded towards each other.*

P. 85. *This explanation of our Saviour's words.*] Bishop Horsley has shown, after Hammond and Whitby, that the declaration of our Lord contains a direct and particular promise to Peter, as distinguished from the other Apostles. See also the passage quoted from Tertullian by the present Bishop of Lincoln, in his Ecclesiastical History illustrated from the Writings of Tertullian; p. 237.

P. 86. *the wall of partition—was first broken down.*] St. Peter's claim to the privilege of first preaching Christ to the

Gentiles was so distinctly asserted by himself, that at first sight there appears a considerable difficulty, unless we suppose, with Basnage (*Exercit. Historico-Criticæ*, p. 125,) that the conversion of Cornelius preceded that of the Ethiopian eunuch, and that St. Luke, as is not unusual with him, inverts the chronological order of the two events. Most of the commentators suppose that the eunuch was a Proselyte of Righteousness. I think it more probable that he was an Egyptian Jew, who had been carried, while young, into Ethiopia: this seems to be Kuinoel's opinion.

## LECTURE V.

P. 87. *guide them into all truth.*] See Archbishop Secker's Sermons, Vol. VI. p. 22.

P. 88. *I withstood him to the face.*] In order to elude the argument which this fact affords against the supposed primacy of St. Peter, the Romanists have adopted a notion of Clemens Alexandrinus, ap. Euseb. *Hist.* I. c. 12, that the person reproved by St. Paul, was not Peter the Apostle, but another Cephas. This notion is elaborately refuted by Deyling, in his *Observ. Sacr.* T. II. p. 520, after Heidegger, and Ittigius, in his *History of the First Century*, p. 230.

P. 96. *a term of reproach or contempt.*] The Jews called the disciples of Christ *Nazarenes*, Acts xxiv. 5, not *Christians*, for they did not use the Greek word *Χριστιανός*, but the Hebrew *Messiah*, or some inflexion of it; and if they had applied to the Christians a name formed from either of these words, it would have implied an acknowledg-

ment of Jesus as their Messiah. The termination of the word bespeaks a Roman rather than a Grecian origin. Tacitus is the first Latin author who mentions the appellation. Annal. IV. 44. *Quos, per flagitia invisos, vulgus Christianos appellabat; auctor nominis ejus Christus, Tiberio imperitante, per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio affectus est.* He therefore regarded it as a term of reproach.

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## LECTURE VI.

P. 105. *The Church—in Jerusalem.*] In the present state of religious controversy it will not be unseasonable to notice the clear and satisfactory evidence, which this history affords, against the claims of the Romish Church to be considered as the eldest born of all the Churches; a character, to which it is evident that the Church of Antioch had a far better title than that of Rome, but that of Jerusalem the best of all; which is therefore called by the Council of Constantinople, *the mother of all the Churches*; and by the Emperor Justin, *the mother of the Christian name*. See Pearson, Lect. in Act. Apost. p. 36. Lowth on Ezekiel xvi. 61. On the independence of the apostolic churches, the reader may consult the Bishop of Lincoln's Remarks on Tertullian, p. 236.

P. 110. *The deacons might be evangelists.*] Timothy, who was a bishop, was commanded by St. Paul to *do the work of an evangelist*, 2 Tim. iv. 5. "We know why four were called evangelists, namely, because they were so well skilled in the history of our Saviour's life and death, as to give it us in writing. By parity of reason, all others, called evangelists, were such as made it their study and business

to make themselves acquainted with our Saviour's actions, and sermons, and sufferings, and to relate such passages of them in the public congregation, as the occasion required. And this was as useful and edifying an office as any in the Church of God, and was extremely necessary for some years after our Lord's ascension; for it was a good while before the Gospels were written, and much longer before they were dispersed, and universally received. During all this time, the evangelists, who could confirm any great truth, add weight to any advice, or reprehension, by rehearsing any discourse, or relating any momentous passage of our Saviour's life and death, must have frequent and great occasion to exercise their abilities; but when the four Gospels were committed to writing, and were in every one's hand, this office of course ceased; nor is there any mention of such officers in the History of the Church of the ages next to the Apostles."—Johnson's Preface to the Second Volume of the Clergyman's Vade-Mecum.

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### LECTURE VII.

P. 134. *ordained to eternal life.*] *τεταγμένοι εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον.* I have suggested that which appears to me to be the most probable of the various interpretations of this passage: not that I think it very material which of them we adopt; for unless *τεταγμένοι* be equivalent to *προωρισμένοι*, which it is not, no argument can be drawn from this text to prove the Calvinistic tenet of predestination.

P. 138. *filled Jerusalem with their doctrine:*] i. e. with their teaching. See Notes on p. 16.

P. 147.] On the subject of universal, or limited redemption; as involving a question of the divine justice, the reader will find some very judicious remarks, in a review of Mr. Grinfield's work on the Salvability of the Heathen, *British Critic* for April, 1828, p. 326.

P. 155.] This interpretation of the phrase *it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us*, nearly coincides with that of Bishop Pearce: "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost; and, *therefore*, to us."

P. 155. *which in the Jewish Scriptures, &c.*] There is, however, no objection to retaining the literal sense of *πορνείας* in this passage, as being a sin in which the heathens indulged without restraint.

P. 156. *Through hesitation or timidity.*] Mr. Blunt, in his ingenious Remarks on the veracity of the evangelists, observes, that as Barnabas was a Cypriot, so probably was Mark; or, at least, that he had friends and relations in Cyprus; and that, having availed himself of the voyage of Paul and Barnabas to that island (xiii. 4.) to visit his connexions there, upon their landing in Pamphylia he left them, and returned to Jerusalem. It is probable that Mark himself was born at Jerusalem, or that he had passed the greater part of his life there, since it appears, from Acts xii. 12, that his mother Mary resided there, as a widow, in her own house.

P. 158. *From this incident, &c.*] See Witsius Melet. Leid. p. 66.

P. 164. *Lucius — Lucas.*] In some of the MSS. of St. Luke's Gospel, the author is called Lucius. Origen



mentions that there were some persons before his time, who supposed that Luke the Evangelist was the same with Lucius, whom St. Paul describes as his kinsman; an opinion maintained by Heumart (Pœcile, T. II. p. 519), and Koehler (Diss. de Luca Evangelista, § 4); and although Pritius asserts that no probable reason can be assigned, why the Apostle should have called him Lucius, in his Epistle to the Romans, I think that the reason which I have suggested in the text, is quite sufficient to account for his use of the Latin form. If Lucius was a proselyte, and yet a relation of St. Paul, who was a Jew, we must suppose him to have had a Gentile father, but a Jewish mother; as was the case with Timothy. It is objected by Michaelis and Kuinoel, that when St. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans, in which he conveys to them the salutation of Lucius, St. Luke was at Philippi, while the Apostle himself wrote from Corinth; and he refers to Acts xx. 6. But it is by no means certain that Luke remained at Philippi, from the time of his being left there by Paul and Silas (Acts xvi. 40), till Paul again visited that town. Paley remarks, "Lucius is another name in the Epistle (to the Romans.) A very slight alteration would convert Λουκιός into Λουκάς, Lucius into Luke, which would produce an additional coincidence: for, if Luke was the author of the history, he was with St. Paul at the time; inasmuch as, describing the voyage which took place, soon after the writing of this Epistle, the historian uses the first person; *We sailed away from Philippi.* Acts xx. 6."—*Horæ Paul.* p. 28, note. If, as is generally supposed, St. Luke was the brother alluded to by St. Paul in 2 Cor. viii. 18, as having been sent by him to Corinth, together with Titus, to receive the collections of the Corinthian Christians, the Apostle would find him there on his arrival, and thus St. Luke would actually be with him, when he wrote his

Epistle to the Romans. Another observation of Kuinoel's is, that if the Luke mentioned in Coloss. iv. 14, had been the Lucius, who was a kinsman of the Apostle, St. Paul would have described him as his relation, rather than under the designation of "the beloved physician." But I can perceive no reason why he should have preferred this description to the other: it is probable that the Colossians would know St. Luke in his character of a physician, quite as well as by his relationship to St. Paul; which was not the case with the Romans; for when the Apostle wrote his Epistle to them, Luke had probably never been at Rome, and, therefore, had never exercised his art among them.

That St. Luke took a part in the work of teaching, may be inferred, though not conclusively, from the manner in which he speaks of himself in conjunction with St. Paul, ver. 13, "*We* sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither." He mentions in chap. xi. 20, that some of them which first preached the word in Antioch "were men of Cyprus and Cyrene;" and this, as Mr. Blunt has well observed, may have been the reason why Barnabas, himself a Cypriote, was selected by the Apostles to visit Antioch, and make inquiry into the state of the Church there. Of the teachers from Cyrene, Lucius was one, and perhaps the only one.

P. 169. *In an oratory by the river side.*] Although this interpretation has been learnedly defended by Joseph Mede and others, I am not sure whether our received version be not more correct, if by *prayer* we understand congregational prayer.

P. 191. *The transition of the disembodied spirit, &c.*] "Non irrisuri omnino, si animi solius restitutionem ab eo audissent: suscepissent enim vernaculæ suæ philosophiæ

præsumtionem." Tertull. de Resurr. Carnis, c. 39. See Knappii Scripta p. 350. The reader is referred to the masterly analysis of this discourse of St. Paul contained in Dr. Bentley's Boyle Lectures.

P. 195. *To an unknown God.*] ἀγνώστῳ Θεῷ, not τῷ ἀγνώστῳ Θεῷ. See Kuinoel on Acts xvii. 23.

P. 198. *Certain also of your own poets.*] i. e. Grecian poets; not Athenian. The hemistich, τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν, is extant in the Phænomena of Aratus, a Cilician poet, v. 5. Nearly the same words occur in the Hymn to Jove, ascribed to Cleanthes, the Stoic philosopher, a native of Lycia, but the successor of Zeno in the Athenian Portico, ἐκ σοῦ γὰρ γένος ἐσμέν. It has been disputed, to which of the two poets St. Paul referred. The question seems to be easily settled, by observing that the Apostle quotes the words of Aratus, not those of Cleanthes. I think it very doubtful whether that admired hymn, which goes under the name of the Stoic philosopher, be not the forgery of a later age.

P. 243. *Some of the imperial household.*] Josephus relates (xx. 7.) that Poppæa Sabina, the wife of Nero, greatly favoured and protected the Jews at Rome; and as he terms her θεοσεβής, Jablonski (Opusc. T. III. p. 294) conjectures that she was a proselyte; and that although she did no credit by her conduct to the religion which she had embraced, she might have interested herself with Nero in behalf of Paul, who was, perhaps, recommended to her by the believing Jews. There is, however, no ground for supposing that she herself became a Christian.

P. 243. *visited these islands.*] This opinion is maintained by Archbishop Usher, in his Britannicarum Ecclesiarum

Antiquitates, p. 4; by Bishop Stillingfleet, in his work on the same subject; and by the present learned Bishop of Salisbury. Jablonski (Opusc. T. III. p. 301) says that it is destitute of all probability. Le Clerc says, that it is chronologically impossible. The reader will find all that is to be said on this subject, in the works above referred to, in the Introduction to Spelman's Concilia; Dr. Hammond's Works, Vol. II. p. 102, and at the end, p. 215; Richardson's Prælectiones Ecclesiasticæ, T. I. & II. The earliest writer who distinctly mentions St. Paul's visit to Britain is Venantius Fortunatus, who lived in the sixth century.



A  
BRIEF AND DISPASSIONATE VIEW  
OF THE  
DIFFICULTIES  
ATTENDING THE  
TRINITARIAN, ARIAN, AND SOCINIAN SYSTEMS.

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BY  
JOSIAH TUCKER, D. D.  
DEAN OF GLOUCESTER.



## BRIEF AND DISPASSIONATE VIEW,

§c. §c.

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THE proofs from various passages of scripture, in favour of a Trinity of persons, in the undivided essence of the Godhead, are so many and various, so copious and express, that it is hardly possible to conceive, there would have been any doubt about their meaning, had the doctrine which they declare been as easy to be understood, as they are explicit in declaring it to be the matter of fact.\*

But after we have gathered from various passages, and by comparing Scriptures with Scriptures, that in fact there is a trinity of *co-equal* persons in one undivided essence;—we cannot proceed a step farther without embarking in endless difficulties and perplexities. We cannot, for instance, conceive, much less define, what is the cause of *personal identity*,—or what is *essence*: And therefore we cannot, by any powers of reason hitherto discovered, pretend to say, whether such a trinity of *co-equal* personalities,

\* See Archbishop Wake's Catechism, Sections LX. and XV. printed at the end of this tract.



or personal identities, can *co-exist* in one undivided essence, or *not*. [Indeed Mr. Lock once attempted to assign the cause or substratum of personal identity; but failed most egregiously, by mistaking the effect for the cause. See Bishop Butler's Dissertation on Personal Identity, at the end of his Analogy. Self-consciousness, the cause assigned by Mr. Lock, may be allowed to be a good *proof* of personal identity; but it cannot possibly be the cause of it; inasmuch as it is itself only the effect, or operation of some other cause, hitherto undiscovered. In short, I must exist, before I can be conscious of my existence. And therefore self-consciousness can be nothing more than the effect of some hidden cause. As to the giving any definition of *essence*, Mr. Lock would not attempt it; but declared himself unequal to such a task.] Moreover, if these co-equal persons in the Trinity should be characterised (as they actually are) under the denomination of a Father,—of a Son,—and of a Spiritual Agent distinct from both; these characteristics increase our difficulties, instead of removing them. For when we come to reason analogically on each of these heads; that is, when we come to descant on the relations and properties of a Father,—and of a Son,\*—and of a third Person distinct from both;—we find, either that our usual rules of reasoning are all inadequate to this purpose, and cannot assist us;—or else, that there cannot be that co-equality and co-eternity of persons in the undivided

\* The incarnation of the eternal Son of God adds to the number of these difficulties: But there is no need of considering this single difficulty in any separate view, or independently of the others.

essence of the Godhead, which the above-mentioned texts of scripture naturally, and at first sight, lead us to believe.

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### THE TRINITARIAN SYSTEM.

A BELIEVER in the Trinity will chuse to adopt the former of these alternatives, viz.—*That our usual rules of reasoning in other cases are inadequate in this*,—not only as the most pious and humble, but as the most rational and defensible opinion. Nay, he will affirm further, that this is no more than what ought to be expected in the course of things; because our rules of reasoning, drawn from the natures, properties, and distinctions of *finite* creatures, must fail, and become unserviceable, to a great degree; when we come to apply them towards explaining the existence, powers, and distinctions inherent in, or belonging to, the infinite and incomprehensible Source of all things; and to confirm this observation by undeniable facts, he will naturally observe, that though we have as clear proofs, both from reason and scripture, as we can have of any thing, that the Deity is an independent and self-existent Being, that he is also eternal, omniscient, and omnipresent,—yet when we come to make use of any human helps towards explaining the *exact* meaning, or ascertaining the *precise ideas* of these things,—we encounter with difficulties almost innumerable; and are so far from making any real progress in knowledge, that it is well if we escape from falling into gross absurdities.

Therefore, seeing that all the primary attributes of God are absolutely above the reach of our mental powers, and in their own nature incomprehensible; and seeing also, that the doctrine of the Trinity is evidently, and according to the very state of the case, one of this incomprehensible sort,—the Trinitarian judges it to be the wiser and more prudent, as well as the more modest part, to accept the doctrine in *the gross*, without entering into any curious disquisitions about it, or pretending to fathom such bottomless depths by the short line of his scanty, imperfect reason.

And having advanced thus far, perhaps he may add *ex abundanti*, that every plain, *unlettered* man, of sound judgment and natural modesty, feels himself obliged to make the very same kind of distinction relative to the doctrine of *Antipodes*, which he, the Trinitarian, thinks necessary to be made respecting the Trinity. For such a man must necessarily reason after the following manner: “Either what all the great scholars so confidently declare, that a ship may sail *topsy-turvy*, with its keel directly opposite to my feet, IS IMPOSSIBLE TO BE TRUE,—or else all my former experiences and rules of judging are of no service to me in this affair; and I must have recourse to other methods of reasoning, hitherto unknown.”

Now this other method, as soon as ever it is discovered, unravels the whole mystery at once; and then the honest man not only comprehends, but sees no manner of difficulty in that very doctrine, which so lately appeared to him to be almost, if not altogether, impossible. The application is obvious: for

what we know to be a fact in one case, ought not to be pronounced to be impossible in another; especially if this latter case should be, in its own nature, still farther removed from all our known powers of apprehending, and usual rules of judging. In one word, from the instance of Antipodes here brought, it may at least be deemed *possible*, that the doctrine of a Trinity of co-equal persons in one undivided essence may become, in some future period of our existence, as intelligible to us all, as that of the Antipodes is at present to men of letters.

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#### THE ARIAN SYSTEM.

AN *Arian*, observing, that the characteristics of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, will necessarily lead us, if we reason according to the common course of other things, to conclude, that there cannot be *that* co-equality, and co-eternity of persons in the Trinity, for which the Trinitarian believer so earnestly and zealously contends, therefore resolves to examine all those texts over again, which are usually brought in support of the Trinitarian doctrine.

Having this bias on his mind, he prepares to search the Holy Scriptures; and then by the help of subtle criticisms, strained, and far-fetched comments and glosses, he at last discovers, or fancies that he discovers, that these texts may be so understood as to imply a supremacy of the first person over the second, and the third,—not only in point of *order*

and economy; but also of necessary existence, omnipresence, omniscience, eternity, and the like.

But having proceeded thus far, his labours are so far from being at an end, that here they properly begin; for every step he advances presents him with fresh difficulties, and new embarrassments: therefore, in order to render his scheme uniform and consistent with itself, and to answer the Trinitarian objections, he must in his turn act on the *defensive side*: that is, he must maintain the following paradoxes, viz. that though the second person in the Trinity ought to be acknowledged to be the Creator of all things both in heaven and earth, yet he himself owes his very existence to the sovereign pleasure and good will of his heavenly Father, and consequently is but a *mere creature*;—that though he is over all, God blessed for ever, yet he is but an inferior, a dependent, and a subaltern God;—though prayers, praises, and adorations are to be offered up to him, yet they are not to be directed *ultimately* to him: [N. B. This is exactly the same apology which the Roman Catholics use for worshipping saints and angels]—though the only-begotten Son of God existed from all eternity, yet he was not co-eval or co-eternal with his Father;—though he is omniscient, yet his knowledge is borrowed and circumscribed;—and though he is omnipresent, yet his omnipresence is merely systematic, relative, and local.

These are some out of many perplexities, which the Arian system unavoidably labours under: but this specimen is enough to convince any indifferent person, that the Arian, in getting rid of the Trinitarian difficulties, doth not at all mend the matter; for he not only strains

the scripture expressions to senses, which they do not naturally convey, but also involves himself in such intricacies (to speak in the softest manner) as even on the footing of human reason, would render his scheme not a jot more eligible than the other. Add to all this, that by representing our Lord in *so* inferior a character as that of a *deputy-divinity*, he evidently saps the foundation of the whole doctrine of redemption, satisfaction, and atonement.

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#### THE SOCINIAN SYSTEM.

THE Socinian, as far as the present controversy is concerned, seems to be a disinterested spectator on both sides. He feels the weight of the objections both against the Trinitarian and the Arian systems; and therefore weakly, perhaps *arrogantly* imagines, that he can devise a third, which is encumbered with no difficulties at all. Filled with this persuasion, he boldly pronounces the Holy Spirit to be *no distinct person*, but only a mere quality, emanation, or attribute of the deity. [Strange, that we should have been commanded to be baptized in the name of a quality, attribute, or emanation!] And as to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, he was a mere man, like other men; being no otherwise the Son of God, than as Adam and all mankind may be stiled the sons, or offspring of one common parent.

This, it must be owned, is very short and concise: It cuts the knot of controversy asunder, and solves all the former difficulties at once. But after this is done,

what is to become of the Holy Scriptures? And how is their authority to be supported, as the infallible oracles of the living God? For, granting, if you please, that an Arian, by the help of subtile distinctions and learned criticisms, might make some passages of Holy Writ to *bend* so as to favour his hypothesis, this is no advantage to a Socinian: for he can never make them *bend*; they must *break*, under the torture of his operation. Nay, more, if his system be really true, the Scriptures of course must be false; and Christ and his Apostles be ranked among the greatest hypocrites and impostors that ever appeared on earth. For either our Lord was more than a mere man, or even than a mere angel; nay, either he is that great I AM, which had an existence, not only before Abraham, but before the worlds began, and upholds all things by the word of his power; or else he must have been one of the falsest and vilest of the human race, for making such groundless pretensions.

The conclusion of the whole is this: the Trinitarian system hath confessedly great difficulties, which human reason cannot pretend to master. The Arian hath full as great; besides the injuries occasioned by distorting several very plain passages of scripture from their natural and genuine signification, also of putting the merits of Christ's sufferings into a very disadvantageous point of view. As to the Socinian, it not only strips the Christian believer of all hopes and comforts in a covenant of grace founded in Christ's *proper* atonement, but also sinks the Gospel into a system of mere morality. Nay, what is still worse, and indeed is the most shocking part of all, it represents the author, and

the first publishers of this moral system, to be such very bad men as not to be worthy of any credit or esteem, on account of their manifold and barefaced falsehoods.

What then is a rational, a modest, and a pious man to do in such cases as these, where dangers and difficulties surround him on every side? Undoubtedly he will reject the Socinian system, if he chuses to retain the essentials of the Christian covenant, and to avoid representing the author of it, as no better than an infamous impostor. Moreover with respect to the Arian, he will weigh deliberately, and consider well, whether this system, with all its boastings, has any real and solid advantages over the Trinitarian; nay, he will particularly examine, whether, on the whole, it be not more liable to objections, and less eligible on Gospel principles. Therefore, if this should prove to be the case, after a serious and solemn examination, surely he is justifiable before God and man in rejecting this likewise, as well as the Socinian:— He is justifiable, I say, in adhering to his former persuasion or belief of a Trinity in Unity; notwithstanding all the cavils which have been or may be raised against it. Nay, in respect to those very mysteries, about which such loud clamours have been excited, he will coolly reflect, that, as he must admit great and inexplicable mysteries to take place both in the natural and the moral world, it would be difficult for him to shew a just reason, why he should reject the like mysteries, when coming from revelation. In one word, as he is sensible that his abilities are limited, he will not attempt to push his enquiries, either in



this, or any other respect, farther than such confined abilities can safely carry him.

Behold therefore, God is great, and we know him not:—We know indeed that he exists; but we know not the manner of his existence in any respect whatever. Consequently, when we believe, that he verily is, *according to what he has revealed himself to be in the Gospel*, and also that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him, we believe all that is required of us,—we believe enough for our present state and condition, because this alone is able to make us wise unto salvation.

# EXTRACT

FROM

## ARCHBISHOP WAKE'S CATECHISM.

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### SECT. IX.

**Q.** Do you look upon Christ to have been made by God *Partaker* of the *Divine Nature*; and so, to have been from all *Eternity, God*, together with him?

**A.** If I believe the Scriptures to give a true account of the Nature of Christ, so I must believe: for I find the same evidences in them of the *Godhead* of *Christ*, that I do of the *Father*.

**Q.** What be those evidences?

**A.** First, they give the *Name* of *God* to him; and that in such a manner as plainly shews it is to be understood, in its most proper import and signification. *Jo.* i. 1. xx. 28. *Rom.* ix. 5. 1 *Tim.* iii. 16. *Phil.* ii. 6. 1 *Jo.* v. 20.

Secondly, they ascribe the most proper, and incommunicable *attributes* of *God* to him. Such as *Omnipotence*, *Jo.* v. 17, 18. *Rev.* i. 8. xi. 17.—*Omniscience*, *Jo.* xvi. 30. xxi. 17. *Luk.* vi. 8. [comp. *Jo.* ii. 24, 25. *Rev.* ii. 23.—*Immensity*, *Matt.* xviii. 20. xxviii. 20. *Jo.* iii. 13.—*Immutability*, *Heb.* i. 11, 12. xiii. 8.—and even *Eternity* itself, *Rev.* i. 8, 17. xxii. 13. *Prov.* viii. 22. *Mich.* v. 2. *Isa.* ix. 6, 7.

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To him, thirdly, they ascribe such *Works*, as can belong to none that is not *God*. The *Creation* of the *World*, *Jo.* i. 3, 10. *Col.* i. 16. *Heb.* i. 2, 10.—The *Preservation* of it, *Heb.* i. 3.—*Miracles*, *Jo.* v. 21, 36. vi. 40.—The *Mission* of the *Holy Ghost*, *Jo.* xv. 26. xvi. 7, 14.—And, in short, all the *Works of Grace* and *Regeneration*, *Jo.* v. 21. x. 16. xiii. 18. *Acts* xvii. 31. xx. 28. *Ephes.* v. 1, 6, &c.

Add to this, fourthly, that he is there shown to be *honoured* as *God*, *Jo.* v. 23. *Heb.* i. 6.—*Prayer* is made to him, *Acts* vii. 59. *1 Cor.* i. 2.—*Faith* and *Hope* are directed to be put in him, *Jo.* xiv. 1. *Psal.* ii. 12.—*Praises* and *Thanksgivings* are given to him, *Glory* and *Honour* are rendered to him, *Rev.* v. 13. compare iv. 11.

And no wonder; since, lastly, the *Nature* of *God* is therein also expressly ascribed to him, *Heb.* i. 3. *Phil.* ii. 6. *Col.* ii. 9. comp. *Col.* i. 15, 19.

**Q.** But if *Christ*, therefore, be called *God*, as well as the *Father*, how can he be called the *Son of God*?

**A.** Because he received his *Divine Nature* from the *Father*; who is the *Beginning*, and *Root* of the *Divinity*; and has communicated his own *Essence* to *Christ*: Who, therefore, though he has the *same Nature*, and so, in that, is *equal* with the *Father*; yet is he in *Order* after him; as being *God of God*.

**Q.** How does it appear that *Christ* received his *Divine Nature* from the *Father*?

**A.** It can only be known by that *Revelation* which *God* has made of it in the *Holy Scriptures*; Where he is, for this reason, said to be *the brightness of his glory*, and *the express image of his person*. *Heb.*

i. 3.—*The image of the invisible God, Col. i. 15. 2 Cor. iv. 4.*—To be *from God, Jo. vii. 29.*—To *have life from the Father, Jo. v. 26,* and the like. And upon this account it is that our Saviour himself says, *that the Father is greater than he, Jo. xiv. 28.*—*That he can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do, Jo. v. 18, 19.* Or if this be not yet plain enough, they tell us farther, in express terms, that he is the *begotten,* and the *only begotten Son of the Father, Jo. i. 14, 18. . . . iii. 16, 18. 1 Jo. iv. 9. v. 1.*

Q. But will not this make the *Holy Ghost,* as much *God's Son, as Christ?* And how then is *Christ* his *only Son?*

A. In matters of this kind, which are so far above our capacities, and of which we know nothing, but what God has been pleased to reveal to us, we must speak, as God, in his word, has taught us to speak. Now the Scriptures no where call the *Holy Ghost,* the *Son of God;* nor *God,* the *Father of the Holy Ghost:* And therefore, though we know not what the precise difference is, yet because the proper act of a *Father* is *to beget;* we say that *Christ* received his *Divine Nature* from *God,* by *generation;* but of the *Holy Ghost,* we say, as the *Scriptures* do, that he *proceedeth from the Father, Jo. xv. 26,* and is *the Spirit* not of the *Father* only, but of the *Son also, Gal. iv. 6. Rom. viii. 9. Phil. i. 19. 1 Pet. i. 11.*

## SECT. XV.

Q. WHAT does the *third part* of your creed contain?

A. It contains all that is needful to be known, and professed by us, with relation to the *Holy Ghost*.

Q. What do you account needful to be believed concerning him?

A. Not only that there is a *Holy Ghost*, but that he is the *third person* in the ever-blessed *Trinity*; and partakes, as such, of the *same divine nature* with the *Father* and the *Son*.

Q. How does this appear?

A. By the plain testimony of the *Holy Scriptures*; by which alone we are capable of knowing any thing in these matters. Now those Sacred Writings evidently speak of him, not only as a *person*, but as a *divine person*; and that distinct both from the *Father*, and from our *Lord Jesus Christ*.

Q. Wherein do the Holy Scriptures speak of this blessed Spirit as of a *person*?

A. They give him the proper *names* of a person: *God*, *Acts* v. 3, 4.—*Lord*, *2 Cor.* iii. 17.—*The Spirit*, *1 Sam.* xvi. 14. *Jo.* xvi. 13.—*The Comforter*, *Jo.* xiv. 26. xvi. 7, &c. They ascribe to him the *properties* of a person; *Understanding*, *1 Cor.* ii. 11.—*Will*, *1 Cor.* xii. They represent him as doing *personal acts*: he is sent, he *cometh*, *goeth*, *heareth*, *teacheth*, *Jo.* xiv. 26. xv. 26, 27. *Jo.* xvi. 7, 13, &c.—*Is tempted*, *resisted*, *grieved*, *Eph.* iv. 30.—*Speaketh*, *commandeth*, *intercedeth*, *Acts* x. 19. xiii. 2. *Rom.* viii. 26. They join him with those who are confessedly *persons*, viz. *God the Father*, and our *Lord Jesus Christ*. In the form

of baptism, *Mat.* xxviii. 19. In St. Paul's wish for the *Corinthians*, *2 Cor.* xiii. 14. In St. John's catalogue of witnesses, *1 Jo.* v. 7. They oppose him to such spirits, as we all allow to be persons, *1 Sam.* xvi. 14. They represent him under personal apparitions, *Mat.* iii. 16. *Acts* ii. 3, and by all this undoubtedly assure us that he is a person.

Q. By what arguments from the Holy Scriptures do you prove that he is a *Divine Person*?

A. By the same by which I before shewed the Son so to be. They ascribe to him the names of God, *Acts* v. 3, 4. *2 Cor.* iii. 17.—The attributes of God, *Heb.* ix. 14. *Psal.* cxxxix. 7. *Job* xxvi. 13.—The honour of God. They tell us, that he is the Spirit of God, *1 Cor.* ii. 11, 12.—That a sin may be immediately committed against him, *Mat.* xii. 31.—That his dwelling in us makes our bodies the temples of God, *1 Cor.* iii. 16.—That Christ, by being conceived by him, became the Son of God, *Luke* i. 35.—They teach us to baptise in his name, together with those of the Father and Son, *Mat.* xxviii. 19.—And shew us even St. Paul himself paying a religious invocation to him, *1 Thes.* iii. 12, 13. *2 Thes.* iii. 3, &c.

Q. How do you prove him not only to be a *Divine Person*, but a Person distinct both from the Father and the Son?

A. He proceedeth from the Father, and therefore is not the Father, *Jo.* xv. 26.—He is sent by the Son, and therefore is not the Son, *Jo.* xvi. 7.—He is sent, sometimes by the Father, in the name of the Son; and sometimes by the Son, from the Father; and therefore is neither the Father, nor the Son, *Jo.* xiv. 26. xv. 26.

Q. But did not you before say, that there is but *one God*? And how now do you say, that the *Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God*?

A. That there is but *one God*, the Holy Scriptures plainly declare, and even reason itself confirms it to us. And yet the same Scriptures as plainly declare every one of these three to be *God*. And the only way we know of reconciling these two, seemingly contrary assertions, is to say, that these three partake of *one*, and the *same divine nature*, communicated from the *Father* to the *Son*; and from *both* to the *Holy Ghost*; and that therefore they together make but *one God*.

Q. How can it be possible that three distinct *persons* should so partake of the *one divine nature*, or *essence*, as altogether to make but *one God*?

A. That is not my concern to determine: this I am sure, that if the *Scriptures* be (as we all allow that they are) the *word of God*, what they plainly deliver must be true, because it is, in effect, delivered by God himself; who can neither be himself deceived, nor will deceive me. Now that they deliver both these propositions to me; that *the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God*; and yet, *that there are not three Gods, but one God*; I am as sure as I can be of any thing that is spoken or written for my understanding. That, therefore, these assertions are true, and credible, I am sure. But how, or after what manner, I am to understand them, so as to remove all shew of contradiction in them, this the Holy Scriptures have not revealed; nor do I, therefore, presume to pronounce any thing more particularly concerning it.

**Q.** Why then do you say that they are *three persons*, and but *one God*, in the *divine essence*?

**A.** Because I know not how better to express the *unity*, and *distinction* of them; and they are *terms* which the *Church* has long received; and I see no reason to depart from them, unless I knew of some better and more apt expressions to use in their stead.

**FINIS.**

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